

Group Review of a Commercial Item Description

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**LESSON ASSIGNMENT SHEET**

<b>Lesson Number</b>	DSW-05
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<b>Lesson Title</b>	Group Review of a Commercial Item Description
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<b>Lesson Time</b>	2.00 Hours
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<b>Lesson Overview</b>	This exercise begins with a brief overview of the format and content of a Commercial Item Description. Student groups review a Commercial Item Description for compliance with Federal and Department of Defense policies for the acquisition of commercial products and brief the group findings to the class.
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<b>Terminal Learning Objective</b>	Given a Commercial Item Description, the student should be able to identify discrepancies from established format and content policies.
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<b>Enabling Learning Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the purpose, format and allowable content for each section of a Commercial Item Description.</li> <li>• Identify the product conformance approaches for a Commercial Item Description.</li> <li>• Apply current DoD policies and instructions for the content and format of Commercial Item Descriptions.</li> </ul>
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<b>Assignments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SCAN: Teaching Note, “Commercial Item Descriptions: (pages 05-3 thru 05-5)</li> <li>• SCAN: Federal Standardization Manual, Chapter 4 (pages 31 thru 46).</li> <li>• SCAN: DoD 4120.24-M, Appendix 4 (pages 111 thru 113).</li> <li>• SCAN: GROUP REVIEW OF A COMMERCIAL ITEM DESCRIPTION Vugraphs (pages 5-VG-1 thru 5-VG-7).</li> </ul>
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**Group Review of a Commercial Item Description**

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**Estimated Student Preparation Time** 0.5 Hour

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**Assessment** Group Exercise

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**Related Lessons** • DSW-03

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**Self Study References** • Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act of 1994.

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**STUDENT NOTE****COMMERCIAL ITEM DESCRIPTIONS****BACKGROUND**

Commercial Item Descriptions (CIDs) were introduced in 1974 to provide an alternate method to specifications for defining requirements and associated verification requirements for those inherently commercial items and products utilized by the Federal Government. Because of the inherent commercial nature of the supplies described by CIDs, management responsibility has been assigned to the General Services Administration. Guidance for the content and format of CIDs is found in Chapter 4 of the Federal Standardization Manual; additional guidance for DoD preparers of CIDs is in Appendix 4 of the DoD 4120.24-M.

Because CIDs are used for the acquisition of inherently commercial products, the use of regulatory requirements and commercial practices and procedures to describe these products is encouraged. Government unique requirements are discouraged, and should be minimized to reflect unique requirements associated with the Government use of the item as compared with how the item is employed by commercial users.

The use of Commercial Item Descriptions should be directed towards achieving the goals of acquisition reform: save money; help remove barriers between the commercial and defense industrial bases; and provide DoD access to new technology.

**DISCUSSION**

The concept of market acceptance is one of the foundations for the acquisition of commercial items and the use of commercial item descriptions. This concept states that in a free market society, such as the United States of America, products offered are subjected to market forces which determine which products are consumed and which are not. These market forces will control the level of quality and the price of items sold in that market. In other words, only those items which satisfy the customer's desires at a reasonable price will be purchased. Items failing to meet both of these conditions will not be sold and will not remain in the commercial marketplace. Because of the effects of these market forces, those items which have been and are continued to be sold in the commercial marketplace provide a level of confidence in the ability of such an item to meet its intended use at an optimal price to the consumer.

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While evaluating the market acceptance of an item, it is important to recognize that there are various market niches for many commercial items related to differing levels of quality associated with the intended usage and application of the item. For example, a home handyman uses different criteria in selecting a hammer than a professional carpenter. It is therefore imperative that the intended usage of the item and the relative market niche that the Government represents, be known while performing the market investigation to evaluate commercially-available products' suitability for use by the Government.

The keys to writing an effective CID lie in performing good market research to evaluate the suitability of commercial products to meet the Government's needs and conducting effective trade-offs with the user between perceived needs for unique applications of the item and what is commercially available. Often there will be various levels of the commercial product, some of which are suitable to the Government's application and some which are not. It then becomes incumbent upon the document preparer, in conjunction with user feedback from the market research data, to provide clear definition of those salient characteristics which cause the differentiation between the products which meet the Government's needs and those which do not.

In developing these salient characteristics, care must be taken to write them to describe the user's needs as modified by the results of the market research rather than describing a manufacturer's product. In describing the salient characteristics, detail design requirements must be minimized to reflect essential needs which cannot be adequately described in performance terms. Also, emphasis must be placed on achieving the goals of acquisition reform. The intent of CIDs is to describe commercially available products which satisfy the Government's needs; not to develop new products or create a Government-unique market niche for an otherwise commercially used product.

Verification of the salient characteristics should rely heavily on the manufacturer's own procedures and methods which allow him to effectively compete in the open market. Use of mandatory, Government-unique inspections should not be employed unless it is the only way to develop confidence in the quality of the supplies being provided. The use of the General Conformance Statement is mandatory in all CIDs, however, the wording of the requirement should be adapted to the product being obtained and the results of the market research. Developers of CIDs must not exclude previous suppliers of acceptable products that do not have other markets than the Government by restrictive wording of the General Conformance Statement paragraph. Other options for verification include the use of Product Samples and the imposition of Market Acceptability criteria. The establishment of market acceptability criteria must be based upon the results of the market research and the intended use of the product and provide a means of discriminating between products which meet the users' needs and those which do not.

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**SUMMARY**

Commercial Item Descriptions are intended to be used for describing commercially available products which will meet the Government's needs. In describing these products, reliance should be placed on regulatory requirements and commercial practices and procedures. The salient characteristics describe those features necessary to meet the users' needs and are based upon the results of the market research to allow differentiation between those products meeting the users' needs from those which do not. Product acceptance should rely upon the manufacturer's own processes and procedures and should reflect commercial acceptance practices for the same product or commodity.

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## GROUP REVIEW OF A COMMERCIAL ITEM DESCRIPTION

**DSW - 05**



## OBJECTIVES

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- Identify the purpose, format and allowable content for each section of a Commercial Item Description.
- Identify the product conformance approaches for a Commercial Item Description.
- Apply current DoD policies and instructions for the content and format of Commercial Item Descriptions.

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## DOCUMENTS COVERING CID POLICY AND PROCEDURES

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- Primary guidance for format and content:
  - Federal Standardization Manual
- Additional guidance:
  - DoD 4120.24-M
  - Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)
  - Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS)

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## CID FORMAT

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- Administrative information
  - First page information necessary for coordination, indexing, maintenance, and distribution of the document
- Sectionalized content
  - Sections numbered
  - Section is only present if there is appropriate content for that section
- Concluding Material

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## ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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- Draft Notice (If Applicable) (4-9 page 35\*)
- Measurement System Identification (4-6 page 34\*)
- Document Identifier (A-A-#####) (4-4 page 34\*)
- Date (4-6 page 34\*)
- Supersession Information (4-6 page 34\*)
- Heading (Figure 4-1 page 42\*)
- Title (4-7 page 34\*)
- Preamble (4-8 pages 34-35\*)
- Improvement Block (4-11 page 35\*)
- AMSC NA (DoD 4120.24-M, AP4.2.3.1, page 112)
- FSC/FSG/Area designation (4-10 page 35\*)

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(\* Indicates Federal Standardization Manual reference)



## SECTIONS OF A CID

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- Scope
- Classification
- Salient Characteristics
- Regulatory Requirements
- Product Conformance Provisions
- Packaging
- Notes

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## SCOPE

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- Purpose:
  - Describes coverage of CID
  - Aids users in selecting CID
  - FedBizOpps synopsis
- Content
  - Concise description which repeats the item name
  - May include intended use
- FSM 4-13 page 36

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## CLASSIFICATION

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- Purpose:
  - Describes how to differentiate between items when a CID covers more than one item of supply
- Content:
  - Explains scheme (types, grades, classes, etc.) used to distinguish between different items covered by the CID
- Federal Standardization Manual 4-14 page 36

 **Not required for all CIDs**

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## SALIENT CHARACTERISTICS

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- Purpose:
  - Provides the essential features of the product
- Content:
  - Lists characteristics which describe products meeting the users' needs
  - Based on users' needs and Market Research
  - Function and performance characteristics encouraged
  - To the extent design control is necessary, may use design characteristics
- Federal Standardization Manual 4-15 pages 36-37

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## REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

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- Purpose:
  - Emphasizes laws/regulations pursuant to law which apply for the item being described
- Content:
  - Known applicable regulatory requirements
- Examples:
  - Dept of Agriculture Standards
  - Federal Hazardous Substance Labeling Act
  - Code of Federal Regulations
- Federal Standardization Manual 4-16 page 37

 **Not required for all CIDs**

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## PRODUCT CONFORMANCE PROVISIONS

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- Purpose:
  - Provides basis for product acceptance
- Content:
  - Describes how to demonstrate that the product offered will satisfy the users' needs
  - Based upon commercial buying practices
- Federal Standardization Manual 4-17 (pages 37-39)
  - Product conformance clause (4-17.a page 37)
  - Product samples
  - Market acceptability (4-17.b pages 37-39)
  - Inspection (4-17.c page 39)

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## PACKAGING

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- Purpose:
  - Provides packaging requirements for the item(s) being described
- Content:
  - Preservation, packing, and packaging necessary to assure the integrity of the item(s) during shipping, handling, and delivery
- When special packaging is required, use of commercial standards is encouraged
- General statement that packaging shall be as specified in the contract is encouraged
- Federal Standardization Manual 4-18, page 39

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## NOTES

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- Purpose:
  - Provides useful information, but not mandatory on the contractor
- Content:
  - Acquisition requirements
  - Sources for referenced documents
  - Additional relevant information not included in other sections
- Federal Standardization Manual 4-19 pages 39-40

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## CONCLUDING MATERIAL

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- Activity Symbols ( FSM 4-20.a, page 40)
  - Preparing Activity
  - Military Interest (if prepared by civilian agency)
  - Civil Agency Coordinating Activities
  - Custodian(s) and Review Activities
  - Industry Associations
- Project Number (DoD only) (FSM 4-20.b, page 40)
- Advisory Note (MIL-STD-961, 5.12.8, page 43)
  - Encouraged for DoD-prepared CIDs

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