



**Illuminating**  
ENGINEERING SOCIETY

**TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM:**  
**IES METHOD FOR EVALUATING LIGHT**  
**SOURCE COLOR RENDITION**  
AN AMERICAN NATIONAL STANDARD



**ANSI/IES TM-30-20**

**TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM:  
IES METHOD FOR  
EVALUATING LIGHT SOURCE COLOR RENDITION  
AN AMERICAN NATIONAL STANDARD**

Publication of this Technical Memorandum  
has been approved by IES.  
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should be directed to the IES..

**Prepared by the  
The IES Color Committee**



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Jason Livingston, *Co-Chair*

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A. Feldman\*

F. Florentine\*

J. Fuller\*

J. Gaines\*

S. Lavoie\*

N. Miller\*

M. Raz\*

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## 1.0 Introduction

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Accurately quantifying the color rendition characteristics of a light source is a complex problem. Color rendition affects many subjective perceptual attributes of a space, including naturalness, vividness, preference, normalness, and visual clarity. Traditionally, there have been distinct approaches for characterizing color rendition, focusing on concepts such as color fidelity, color discrimination, or color preference, and often relying on a single-number characterization. These approaches vary in their relationship to any given subjective impression. Regardless of approach, there is no one metric or measure that can accurately quantify all subjective perceptions of color rendition or identify the most desirable light source for every application.<sup>1,2</sup> A precise and robust method for comprehensively characterizing color rendition is critical to specifying appropriate light sources and optimizing spectral characteristics of light sources.

This Technical Memorandum describes a method for evaluating light source color rendition that takes an objective and statistical approach, quantifying both overall average properties (color fidelity, gamut area) and hue-specific properties (fidelity, chroma shift, hue shift) of a light source using numerical and graphical techniques. It is important to note that it does not attempt to directly characterize human perceptions, such as color preference, or to provide a single number that captures the combined color rendition qualities of a light source. Using various combinations of the included measures, a user is expected to be able to rely on experience and/or design guidelines to determine what is most appropriate for a specific application. This document focuses only on describing the objective characterization techniques; it does not relate values to a subjective evaluation.

This Technical Memorandum consolidates and synthesizes numerous research efforts that have been ongoing for several years, and was developed by representatives of the manufacturing, specification, and research segments of the lighting industry.

### 1.1 Calculation Components

This document is a tool comprising a set of measures that are all based on a standardized calculation procedure. The method is based on theoretically comparing the appearance of a set of color samples as rendered by a test light source and a reference illuminant, quantified with a model of human vision. Thus, the method includes three primary components: a system for defining the reference illuminant, specification of the color samples, and implementation of a model of human vision. An overview of each component is provided here.

The method described in this document compares color samples as rendered by a given test source and a reference illuminant at the same correlated color temperature (CCT), with the reference illuminant being Planckian radiation up to and including 4000 K, a proportional blend of Planckian radiation and a CIE daylight (D) series illuminant between 4001 K and 4999 K, or a CIE D series illuminant at or above 5000 K. This familiar reference-based approach is compatible with a typical lighting design process, where color temperature is decided before color rendition is considered. The implications of choosing this system for defining the reference illuminant—based on the 2015 version of this document, IES TM-30-15—have been documented in “What is the Reference? An Examination of Alternatives to the Reference Sources Used in IES TM-30-15.”<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that all measures specified in this document rely on the same reference scheme, allowing for a cohesive system.

This method utilizes 99 color evaluation samples (CES)—each represented by a spectral reflectance function—to quantify the difference in color rendition between the test source and reference illuminant. The samples were statistically down-selected from an initial collection of more than 100,000 measured objects, in order to be representative of the world of possible colors.<sup>4-6</sup> A majority of the more than 100,000 spectral reflectance functions considered came from the University of Leeds database,<sup>7</sup> which is itself a meta-base containing objects of various origins: textiles, plastics, skin tones, color systems. The Leeds database also includes the Standard Object Colour Spectra (SOCS) database,<sup>8</sup> which contains printed materials, skin tones, natural objects, paints, and textiles. Additional data included natural objects,<sup>9,10</sup> flowers,<sup>11</sup> skin tones,<sup>12</sup> and paints.<sup>9,13</sup>