INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF UNITS (SI)

The International System of Units, abbreviated as SI (from the French name *Le Système International d'Unités*), was established in 1960 by the 11th General Conference on Weights and Measures (CGPM) as the modern metric system of measurement. The core of the SI is the seven base units for the physical quantities length, mass, time, electric current, thermodynamic temperature, amount of substance, and luminous intensity. These base units are:

	SI base unit	
Base quantity	**Name**	**Symbol**
length	meter	m
mass	kilogram	kg
time	second	s
electric current	ampere	A
thermodynamic temperature	kelvin	K
amount of substance	mole	mol
luminous intensity	candela	cd

The SI base units are defined as follows:

meter: The meter is the length of the path travelled by light in vacuum during a time interval of 1/299 792 458 of a second.

kilogram: The kilogram is the unit of mass; it is equal to the mass of the international prototype of the kilogram.

second: The second is the duration of 9 192 631 770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the cesium 133 atom.

ampere: The ampere is that constant current which, if maintained in two straight parallel conductors of infinite length, of negligible circular cross-section, and placed 1 meter apart in vacuum, would produce between these conductors a force equal to $2 \cdot 10^{-7}$ newton per meter of length.

kelvin: The kelvin, unit of thermodynamic temperature, is the fraction 1/273.16 of the thermodynamic temperature of the triple point of water.

mole: The mole is the amount of substance of a system which contains as many elementary entities as there are atoms in 0.012 kilogram of carbon 12. When the mole is used, the elementary entities must be specified and may be atoms, molecules, ions, electrons, other particles, or specified groups of such particles.

candela: The candela is the luminous intensity, in a given direction, of a source that emits monochromatic radiation of frequency $540 \cdot 10^{12}$ hertz and that has a radiant intensity in that direction of 1/683 watt per steradian.

SI derived units

Derived units are units which may be expressed in terms of base units by means of the mathematical symbols of multiplication and division (and, in the case of °C, subtraction). Certain derived units have been given special names and symbols, and these special names and symbols may themselves be used in combination with those for base and other derived units to express the units of other quantities. The next table lists some examples of derived units expressed directly in terms of base units:

	SI derived unit	
Physical quantity	**Name**	**Symbol**
area	square meter	m^2
volume	cubic meter	m^3
speed, velocity	meter per second	m/s
acceleration	meter per second squared	m/s^2
wave number	reciprocal meter	m^{-1}
density, mass density	kilogram per cubic meter	kg/m^3
specific volume	cubic meter per kilogram	m^3/kg
current density	ampere per square meter	A/m^2
magnetic field strength	ampere per meter	A/m
concentration (of amount of substance)	mole per cubic meter	mol/m^3
luminance	candela per square meter	cd/m^2
refractive index	(the number) one	1[a]

[a] The symbol "1" is generally omitted in combination with a numerical value.

For convenience, certain derived units, which are listed in the next table, have been given special names and symbols. These names and symbols may themselves be used to express other derived units. The special names and symbols are a compact form for the expression of units that are used frequently. The final column shows how the SI units concerned may be expressed in terms of SI base units. In this column, factors such as m^0, kg^0 ..., which are all equal to 1, are not shown explicitly.

			SI derived unit expressed in terms of:	
Physical quantity	**Name**	**Symbol**	**Other SI units**	**SI base units**
plane angle	radian[a]	rad	$m \cdot m^{-1} = 1$[b]	
solid angle	steradian[a]	sr[c]	$m^2 \cdot m^{-2} = 1$[b]	
frequency	hertz	Hz	s^{-1}	
force	newton	N	$m \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2}$	
pressure, stress	pascal	Pa	N/m^2	$m^{-1} \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2}$
energy, work, quantity of heat	joule	J	$N \cdot m$	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2}$
power, radiant flux	watt	W	J/s	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-3}$
electric charge, quantity of electricity	coulomb	C	$s \cdot A$	
electric potential difference, electromotive force	volt	V	W/A	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-3} \cdot A^{-1}$
capacitance	farad	F	C/V	$m^{-2} \cdot kg^{-1} \cdot s^4 \cdot A^2$
electric resistance	ohm	Ω	V/A	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-3} \cdot A^{-2}$
electric conductance	siemens	S	A/V	$m^{-2} \cdot kg^{-1} \cdot s^3 \cdot A^2$
magnetic flux	weber	Wb	$V \cdot s$	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2} \cdot A^{-1}$

magnetic flux density	tesla	T	Wb/m^2	$kg \cdot s^{-2} \cdot A^{-1}$
inductance	henry	H	Wb/A	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2} \cdot A^{-2}$
Celsius temperature	degree Celsius[d]	°C		K
luminous flux	lumen	lm	cd · sr[c]	$m^2 \cdot m^{-2} \cdot cd = cd$
illuminance	lux	lx	lm/m^2	$m^2 \cdot m^{-4} \cdot cd = m^{-2} \cdot cd$
activity (of a radionuclide)	becquerel	Bq		s^{-1}
absorbed dose, specific energy (imparted), kerma	gray	Gy	J/kg	$m^2 \cdot s^{-2}$
dose equivalent, ambient dose equivalent, directional dose equivalent, personal dose equivalent, organ equivalent dose	sievert	Sv	J/kg	$m^2 \cdot s^{-2}$
catalytic activity	katal	kat		$s^{-1} \cdot mol$

[a] The radian and steradian may be used with advantage in expressions for derived units to distinguish between quantities of different nature but the same dimension. Some examples of their use in forming derived units are given in the next table.

[b] In practice, the symbols rad and sr are used where appropriate, but the derived unit "1" is generally omitted in combination with a numerical value.

[c] In photometry, the name steradian and the symbol sr are usually retained in expressions for units.

[d] It is common practice to express a thermodynamic temperature, symbol T, in terms of its difference from the reference temperature T_0 = 273.15 K. The numerical value of a Celsius temperature t expressed in degrees Celsius is given by t/°C = T/K-273.15. The unit °C may be used in combination with SI prefixes, e.g., millidegree Celsius, m°C. Note that there should never be a space between the ° sign and the letter C, and that the symbol for kelvin is K, not °K.

The SI derived units with special names may be used in combinations to provide a convenient way to express more complex physical quantities. Examples are given in the next table:

	SI derived unit		
Physical Quantity	**Name**	**Symbol**	**As SI base units**
dynamic viscosity	pascal second	Pa · s	$m^{-1} \cdot kg \cdot s^{-1}$
moment of force	newton meter	N · m	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2}$
surface tension	newton per meter	N/m	$kg \cdot s^{-2}$
angular velocity	radian per second	rad/s	$m \cdot m^{-1} \cdot s^{-1} = s^{-1}$
angular acceleration	radian per second squared	rad/s^2	$m \cdot m^{-1} \cdot s^{-2} = s^{-2}$
heat flux density, irradiance	watt per square meter	W/m^2	$kg \cdot s^{-3}$
heat capacity, entropy	joule per kelvin	J/K	$m^{-3} \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2} \cdot K^{-1}$
specific heat capacity, specific entropy	joule per kilogram kelvin	J/(kg · K)	$m^2 \cdot s^{-2} \cdot K^{-1}$
specific energy	joule per kilogram	J/kg	$m^2 \cdot s^{-2}$
thermal conductivity	watt per meter kelvin	W/(m · K)	$m \cdot kg \cdot s^{-3} \cdot K^{-1}$
energy density	joule per cubic meter	J/m^3	$m^{-1} \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2}$
electric field strength	volt per meter	V/m	$m \cdot kg \cdot s^{-3} \cdot A^{-1}$
electric charge density	coulomb per cubic meter	C/m^3	$m^{-3} \cdot s \cdot A$
electric flux density	coulomb per square meter	C/m^2	$m^{-2} \cdot s \cdot A$
permittivity	farad per meter	F/m	$m^{-3} \cdot kg^{-1} \cdot s^4 \cdot A^2$
permeability	henry per meter	H/m	$m \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2} \cdot A^{-2}$
molar energy	joule per mole	J/mol	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2} \cdot mol^{-1}$
molar entropy, molar heat capacity	joule per mole kelvin	J/(mol · K)	$m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-2} \cdot K^{-1} \cdot mol^{-1}$
exposure (x and γ rays)	coulomb per kilogram	C/kg	$kg^{-1} \cdot s \cdot A$
absorbed dose rate	gray per second	Gy/s	$m^2 \cdot s^{-3}$
radiant intensity	watt per steradian	W/sr	$m^4 \cdot m^{-2} \cdot kg \cdot s^{-3} = m^2 \cdot kg \cdot s^{-3}$
radiance	watt per square meter steradian	$W/(m^2 \cdot sr)$	$m^2 \cdot m^{-2} \cdot kg \cdot s^{-3} = kg \cdot s^{-3}$
catalytic (activity) concentration	katal per cubic meter	kat/m^3	$m^{-3} \cdot s^{-1} \cdot mol$

In practice, with certain quantities preference is given to the use of certain special unit names, or combinations of unit names, in order to facilitate the distinction between different quantities having the same dimension. For example, the SI unit of frequency is designated the hertz, rather than the reciprocal second, and the SI unit of angular velocity is designated the radian per second rather than the reciprocal second (in this case retaining the word radian emphasizes that angular velocity is equal to 2π times the rotational frequency). Similarly the SI unit of moment of force is designated the newton meter rather than the joule.

In the field of ionizing radiation, the SI unit of activity is designated the becquerel rather than the reciprocal second, and the SI units of absorbed dose and dose equivalent the gray and sievert, respectively, rather than the joule per kilogram. In the field of catalysis, the SI unit of catalytic activity is designated the katal rather than the mole per second. The special names becquerel, gray, sievert, and katal were specifically introduced because of the dangers to human health which might arise from mistakes involving the units reciprocal second, joule per kilogram and mole per second.

Units for dimensionless quantities, quantities of dimension one

Certain quantities are defined as the ratios of two quantities of the same kind, and thus have a dimension which may be expressed by the number one. The unit of such quantities is necessarily a derived unit coherent with the other units of the SI and, since it is formed as the ratio of two identical SI units, the unit also may be expressed by the number one. Thus the SI unit of all quantities having the dimensional product one is the number one. Examples of such quantities are refractive index, relative permeability, and friction factor. Other quantities having the unit 1 include "characteristic numbers" like the Prandtl number and numbers which represent a count, such as a number of molecules, degeneracy (number of energy levels), and partition function in statistical thermodynamics. All of these quantities are described as being dimensionless, or of dimension one, and have the coherent SI unit 1. Their values are simply expressed as numbers and, in general, the unit 1 is not explicitly shown. In a few cases, however, a special name is given to this unit, mainly to avoid confusion between some compound derived units. This is the case for the radian, steradian and neper.

SI prefixes

The following prefixes have been approved by the CGPM for use with SI units. Only one prefix may be used before a unit. Thus 10^{-12} farad should be designated pF, not μμF.

Factor	Name	Symbol	Factor	Name	Symbol
10^{24}	yotta	Y	10^{-1}	deci	d
10^{21}	zetta	Z	10^{-2}	centi	c
10^{18}	exa	E	10^{-3}	milli	m
10^{15}	peta	P	10^{-6}	micro	μ
10^{12}	tera	T	10^{-9}	nano	n
10^{9}	giga	G	10^{-12}	pico	p
10^{6}	mega	M	10^{-15}	femto	f
10^{3}	kilo	k	10^{-18}	atto	a
10^{2}	hecto	h	10^{-21}	zepto	z
10^{1}	deka	da	10^{-24}	yocto	y

The kilogram

Among the base units of the International System, the unit of mass is the only one whose name, for historical reasons, contains a prefix. Names and symbols for decimal multiples and submultiples of the unit of mass are formed by attaching prefix names to the unit name “gram” and prefix symbols to the unit symbol “g”.

> *Example :* 10^{-6} kg = 1 mg (1 milligram) *but not* 1 μkg (1 microkilogram).

Units used with the SI

Many units that are not part of the SI are important and widely used in everyday life. The CGPM has adopted a classification of non-SI units: (1) units accepted for use with the SI (such as the traditional units of time and of angle); (2) units accepted for use with the SI whose values are obtained experimentally; and (3) other units currently accepted for use with the SI to satisfy the needs of special interests.

(1) Non-SI units accepted for use with the International System

Name	Symbol	Value in SI units
minute	min	1 min = 60 s
hour	h	1 h= 60 min = 3600 s
day	d	1 d = 24 h = 86 400 s
degree	°	1° = (π/180) rad
minute	’	1’ = (1/60)° = (π/10 800) rad
second	”	1” = (1/60)’ = (π/648 000) rad
liter	l, L	1L= 1 dm^3= 10^{-3} m^3
metric ton	t	1 t = 10^3 kg
neper[a]	Np	1 Np = 1
bel[b]	B	1 B = (1/2) ln 10 Np

[a] The neper is used to express values of such logarithmic quantities as field level, power level, sound pressure level, and logarithmic decrement. Natural logarithms are used to obtain the numerical values of quantities expressed in nepers. The neper is coherent with the SI, but is not yet adopted by the CGPM as an SI unit. In using the neper, it is important to specify the quantity.

[b] The bel is used to express values of such logarithmic quantities as field level, power level, sound-pressure level, and attenuation. Logarithms to base ten are used to obtain the numerical values of quantities expressed in bels. The submultiple decibel, dB, is commonly used.

(2) Non-SI units accepted for use with the International system, whose values in SI units are obtained experimentally

Name	Symbol	Value in SI Units
electronvolt[b]	eV	1 eV = 1.602 176 53(14) ·10^{-19} J[a]
dalton[c]	Da	1 Da = 1.660 538 86(28) · 10^{-27} kg[a]
unified atomic mass unit[c]	u	1 u = 1 Da
astronomical unit[d]	ua	1 ua = 1.495 978 706 91(06) · 10^{11} m[a]

[a] For the electronvolt and the dalton (unified atomic mass unit), values are quoted from the 2002 CODATA set of the Fundamental Physical Constants (p. 1-1 of this Handbook). The value given for the astronomical unit is quoted from the IERS Conventions 2003 (D.D. McCarthy and G. Petit, eds., IERS Technical Note 32, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag des Bundesamts für Kartographie und Geodäsie, 200). The value of ua in meters comes from the JPL ephemerides DE403 (Standish E.M. 1995, “Report of the IAU WGAS Sub-Group on Numerical Standards”, in “Highlights of Astronomy”, Appenlzer ed., pp 180-184, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht). It has been determined in “TDB” units using Barycentric Dynamical Time TDB as a time coordinate for the barycentric system.

[b] The electronvolt is the kinetic energy acquired by an electron in passing through a potential difference of 1 V in vacuum.

[c] The Dalton and unified atomic mass unit are alternative names for the same unit, equal to 1/12 of the mass of an unbound atom of the nuclide ^{12}C, at rest and in its ground state. The dalton may be combined with SI prefixes to express the masses of large molecules in kilodalton, kDa, or megadalton, MDa.

[d] The astronomical unit is a unit of length approximately equal to the mean Earth-Sun distance. It is the radius of an unperturbed circular Newtonian orbit about the Sun of a particle having infinitesimal mass, moving with a mean motion of 0.017 202 098 95 radians/day (known as the Gaussian constant).

(3) Other non-SI units currently accepted for use with the International System

Name	Symbol	Value in SI Units
nautical mile		1 nautical mile = 1852 m
knot		1 nautical mile per hour = (1852/3600) m/s
are		1 a = 1 dam^2 = 10^2 m^2
hectare	ha	1 ha = 1 hm^2 = 10^4 m^2
bar	bar	1 bar = 0.1 MPa = 100 kPa = 10^5 Pa
ångström	Å	1 Å = 0.1 nm = 10^{-10} m
barn	b	1 b = 100 fm^2 = 10^{-28} m^2

Other non-SI units

The SI does not encourage the use of cgs units, but these are frequently found in old scientific texts. The following table gives the relation of some common cgs units to SI units.

Name	Symbol	Value in SI units
erg	erg	1 erg = 10^{-7} J
dyne	dyn	1 dyn = 10^{-5} N
poise	P	1P = 1dyn· s/cm^2 = 0.1 Pa‥ s
stokes	St	1 St = 1 cm^2/s = 10^{-4} m^2/s
gauss	G	1G $\triangleq$ 10^{-4} T
oersted	Oe	1 Oe $\triangleq$ (1000/4π) A/m
maxwell	Mx	1Mx $\triangleq$ 10^{-8} Wb
stilb	sb	1 sb = 1 cd/cm^2 = 10^4 cd/m^2
phot	ph	1 ph = 10^4 lx
gal	Gal	1 Gal = 1 cm/s^2 = 10^{-2} m/s^2

Note: The symbol $\triangleq$ should be read as “corresponds to”; these units cannot strictly be equated because of the different dimensions of the electromagnetic cgs and the SI.

Examples of other non-SI units found in the older literature and their relation to the SI are given below. Use of these units in current texts is discouraged.

Name	**Symbol**	**Value in SI units**
curie	Ci	1 Ci = $3.7 \cdot 10^{10}$ Bq
roentgen	R	1 R = $2.58 \cdot 10^{-4}$ C/kg
rad	rad	1 rad = 1 cGy = 10^{-2} Gy
rem	rem	1 rem = 1 cSv = 10^{-2} Sv
X unit		1 X unit ≈ $1.002 \cdot 10^{-4}$ nm
gamma	γ	1 γ =1 nT = 10^{-9} T
jansky	Jy	1Jy = 10^{-26} W · $\mathrm{m}^{-2} \cdot \mathrm{Hz}^{-1}$
fermi		1 fermi = 1 fm = 10^{-15} m
metric carat		1 metric carat = 200 mg = $2 \cdot 10^{-4}$ kg
torr	Torr	1 Torr = (101325/760) Pa
standard atmosphere	atm	1 atm = 101325 Pa
calorie(a)	cal	1 cal = 4.184 J
micron	μ	1 μ = 1 μm = 10^{-6} m

(a) Several types of calorie have been used; the value given here is the so-called "thermochemical calorie".

References

1. Taylor, B. N., *The International System of Units (SI)*, NIST Special Publication 330, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD, 2001.
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4. NIST Physical Reference Data web site, <http://physics.nist.gov/cuu/Units/index.html>, October 2004.