



Yes, No, Abstain – A Careful Look at JTC1 Voting Options

JTC1 Directives, Section 13.1 call for the use of the DIS Letter Ballot (see Figure 1 below) when voting on Fast Track submissions. In essence, National Bodies have three options – yes (approval), no (disapproval), or abstain. Voting electronically, via LiveLink, National Bodies have the same options.

Confusion arises on the meaning and implications of these three distinct options and on how best to vote when there are technical and intellectual property concerns that need to be addressed before approving a specification. In addition, there is confusion on what “abstain” means and whether a vote can be changed from “yes” to “no.” This paper addresses the specific implications of each option based on a close examination of JTC1 and IEC directives and precedents.

The JTC1 Directives - Voting options are detailed in *JTC1 Directives*¹, Section 9.8

“The period for fast-track DIS (or DAM) voting shall be six months, consisting of a 30-day JTC 1 National Body review period followed by a five-month ballot period. NBs may reply in one of the following ways:

- Approval of the technical content of the DIS as presented (editorial or other comments may be appended);
- Disapproval of the DIS (or DAM) for technical reasons to be stated, with proposals for changes that would make the document acceptable (acceptance of these proposals shall be referred to the NB concerned for confirmation that the vote can be changed to approval);
- Abstention (see 9.1.2).

[Note: Conditional approval should be submitted as a disapproval vote.]”

Analysis of Voting Options – National Bodies should understand the implications of each vote:

Approval – National Bodies should choose this ONLY IF the standard is free of known technical errors. The DIS Ballot² states, “If a national body votes affirmatively, it shall not submit comments.” Further, the IEC electronic ballot system does not allow for comments to be submitted with a “yes”

1 An overview page with links to the Directives in various formats,

http://isotc.iso.org/livelink/livelink/fetch/2000/2489/Ittf_Home/Directives.html.

A direct link to the HTML version of the Directives (select chapter 9 for votes on Fast Track DIS):

<http://isotc.iso.org/livelink/livelink.exe/fetch/2000/2489/186491/186605/Foreword.html?nodeid=5541785&vernum=0>

2 Annex G of the Directives - <http://isotc.iso.org/livelink/livelink.exe/fetch/2000/2489/186491/186605/AnnexG.html>

G18 – DIS Letter Ballot Form: <http://isotc.iso.org/livelink/livelink.exe/fetch/2000/2489/186491/186605/docs/G18.html>

vote in order to enforce the principle of “approval as presented.” This “yes” vote is only appropriate when a National Body approves of the specification *as is* and has identified merely “editorial or other [non-technical] comments” which means typographical, spelling or grammatical errors. This vote does NOT GUARANTEE a Ballot Resolution Meeting nor that comments will be addressed.

Disapproval – This is sometimes referred to as “conditional approval” meaning this is the choice National Bodies should choose if they feel that there are technical mistakes, intellectual property reservations, or any other errors in the specification. As noted in the *JTC1 Directives*, this is the recommended vote for approval of a standard provided that the deficiencies identified are corrected in the manner suggested. Voting this way GUARANTEES that comments will be satisfactorily addressed at a Ballot Resolution Meeting. There is a line on the ballot that can be checked under this option that allows this; it says, “acceptance of specified technical modifications will change our vote to approval.”

Abstain – this is the appropriate choice if the National Body lacks the technical competency (or time) to properly evaluate the submission. It can also be used if there was no consensus on “approval” or “disapproval.” Choosing this does NOT GUARANTEE that comments will be addressed during the Ballot Resolution Meeting, but the comments will probably be shared and are encouraged.

Please keep in mind the following key facts:

- Errors that have been identified on National Body ballots must be fixed before approval may be granted. That is why this process has been established. Identifying and resolving errors in specifications before they become standards is critical to the legitimacy of JTC1, IEC and ISO and the means to ensure National Bodies' interests and expertise are represented.
- The Ballot Resolution Meeting to address errors occurs ONLY IF there are “disapproval with comments” votes. If the requisite number of National Bodies vote “approval,” *even with comments*, there will NOT be a Ballot Resolution Meeting and no procedural basis for fixing the standard.
- Despite any “promises” from Ecma International or others, voting “approval with comments” will not ensure technical errors are addressed. These “promises” are outside of the JTC1 process and offer National Bodies no guarantees.
- A “disapproval” vote CAN be changed to “approval” at the Ballot Resolution Meeting, or afterwards. This is the best option to see a standard approved ONLY IF the technical, intellectual property, and oversight issues have been addressed in the desired manner.
- Voting “approval” and changing to “disapproval” is atypical in JTC1. Section 9.8 says that conditional approvals should be submitted as a “disapproval” vote.

JTC1 Directives can be found at <http://www.jtc1sc34.org/repository/0828.pdf> (p. 113 has the DIS Ballot). Also see www.odfalliance.org/resources/DIS%2029500-OOXML%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf and www.odfalliance.org/resources/The%20Technical%20Case%20Against%20OOXML.pdf.

Figure 1 – DIS Letter Ballot

G18 DIS Letter Ballot

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**VOTE ON
ENQUIRY
DRAFT**

VOTE ON ISO/IEC DIS	
Date	ISO/IEC JTC 1
National body	

Circulated to all national bodies for voting in accordance with the ISO/IEC JTC 1 Directives. All national bodies are invited to vote.

P-members of the joint technical committee concerned have an obligation to vote.

To cast a vote on a Draft International Standard, national bodies shall complete and sign this ballot paper, **and return it to the ISO Central Secretariat.**

If a national body votes affirmatively, it shall not submit comments. If a national body finds the DIS unacceptable, it shall vote negatively and state the technical reasons.

ISO/IEC DIS Title

We approve the technical content of the draft

as presented

with comments (editorial or other) appended

We disapprove for the technical reasons stated

The reasons for our disapproval are the following (use a separate page as annex, if necessary)

Acceptance of specified technical modifications will change our vote to approval

We abstain

Signature