# IPC Section 19

## Section 19 of the Indian Penal Code: "Document"  
  
Section 19 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) defines "document." This definition is fundamental to numerous offenses within the IPC, as many crimes involve the creation, alteration, or use of documents for illegal purposes. Understanding the breadth and nuances of this definition is crucial for legal professionals, law enforcement, and anyone dealing with legal documents or information.  
  
\*\*The Text of Section 19:\*\*  
  
Section 19 states:  
  
“Document.—The word ‘document’ denotes any matter expressed or described upon any substance by means of letters, figures or marks, or by more than one of those means, intended to be used, or which may be used, as evidence of that matter.”  
  
  
\*\*Deconstructing the Definition:\*\*  
  
The definition highlights several key elements:  
  
1. \*\*"Matter expressed or described":\*\* This indicates that a document must contain some form of information, idea, or concept. This matter can be factual, fictional, or even abstract.  
  
2. \*\*"Upon any substance":\*\* This broadens the scope of what can be considered a document beyond traditional paper. It includes any material that can hold information, such as electronic storage devices, metal plates, cloth, or even stone.  
  
3. \*\*"By means of letters, figures or marks":\*\* This specifies the methods by which the matter is represented on the substance. This includes traditional writing, numerical representations, and any other symbols or markings that convey meaning.  
  
4. \*\*"Intended to be used, or which may be used, as evidence":\*\* This is the crucial element that distinguishes a document from a mere inscription or marking. A document must have the potential to serve as evidence of the matter it contains. This doesn’t require that the document be currently admissible in court; the potential for use as evidence is sufficient.  
  
  
\*\*Expanding on the Key Elements:\*\*  
  
Let's delve deeper into each element:  
  
\* \*\*Matter Expressed or Described:\*\* The matter can be anything capable of being recorded and communicated. This includes:  
 \* \*\*Facts:\*\* A record of events, transactions, or measurements.  
 \* \*\*Statements:\*\* Declarations, assertions, or claims.  
 \* \*\*Instructions:\*\* Directions or commands.  
 \* \*\*Ideas or Concepts:\*\* Philosophical thoughts, artistic expressions, or scientific theories.  
 \* \*\*Fictional Narratives:\*\* Stories, poems, or plays.  
  
\* \*\*Substance:\*\* The substance can be anything capable of bearing the recorded matter. Examples include:  
 \* \*\*Paper:\*\* Traditional medium for documents.  
 \* \*\*Parchment or Vellum:\*\* Historical materials used for documents.  
 \* \*\*Cloth or Fabric:\*\* Used for banners, flags, or maps.  
 \* \*\*Metal:\*\* Used for engravings, inscriptions, or plates.  
 \* \*\*Stone:\*\* Used for inscriptions, carvings, or tablets.  
 \* \*\*Wood:\*\* Used for signs, carvings, or printing blocks.  
 \* \*\*Electronic Storage Devices:\*\* Hard drives, USB drives, memory cards, and cloud storage.  
 \* \*\*Magnetic Tape:\*\* Used for audio or video recordings.  
 \* \*\*Photographic Film:\*\* Used for images.  
  
  
\* \*\*Means of Representation:\*\* The matter can be represented through various means:  
 \* \*\*Letters:\*\* Alphabetic characters used for writing.  
 \* \*\*Figures:\*\* Numerical symbols.  
 \* \*\*Marks:\*\* Any other symbols, signs, or markings that convey meaning, including punctuation marks, musical notations, scientific symbols, and even fingerprints or DNA profiles.  
  
  
\* \*\*Intended or Potential Use as Evidence:\*\* This element is crucial. The document must have the potential to prove or disprove something. This potential use as evidence can be in various contexts:  
 \* \*\*Legal Proceedings:\*\* Court cases, arbitrations, or inquiries.  
 \* \*\*Business Transactions:\*\* Contracts, invoices, or receipts.  
 \* \*\*Historical Research:\*\* Ancient texts, maps, or records.  
 \* \*\*Scientific Studies:\*\* Data, observations, or experimental results.  
  
  
\*\*Illustrative Examples:\*\*  
  
\* \*\*Contracts:\*\* Agreements between parties, outlining terms and conditions.  
\* \*\*Wills:\*\* Legal documents outlining the distribution of assets after death.  
\* \*\*Deeds:\*\* Documents transferring ownership of property.  
\* \*\*Certificates:\*\* Documents attesting to facts, qualifications, or achievements.  
\* \*\*Letters:\*\* Written communications between individuals or organizations.  
\* \*\*Maps:\*\* Visual representations of geographical areas.  
\* \*\*Photographs:\*\* Images captured on film or digitally.  
\* \*\*Emails:\*\* Electronic messages exchanged between individuals or organizations.  
\* \*\*Text Messages:\*\* Short messages sent via mobile phones.  
\* \*\*Computer Files:\*\* Data stored on electronic devices.  
\* \*\*Audio and Video Recordings:\*\* Recordings of sound or moving images.  
  
  
\*\*Documents and Electronic Evidence:\*\*  
  
With the increasing use of technology, the definition of "document" has evolved to encompass electronic evidence. Indian courts have recognized electronic records as documents under Section 19, particularly with the enactment of the Information Technology Act, 2000.  
  
  
\*\*Importance of Section 19 in Different Offenses:\*\*  
  
The definition of "document" in Section 19 is crucial for a wide range of offenses, including:  
  
\* \*\*Forgery (Sections 463-477A):\*\* Forgery involves making a false document or altering a genuine document with the intent to defraud. The definition of "document" is essential to determine what constitutes a forgeable item.  
\* \*\*Using as Genuine a Forged Document (Section 471):\*\* This offense requires the fraudulent use of a forged document.  
\* \*\*Fabricating False Evidence (Sections 191-194):\*\* These sections deal with creating or presenting false evidence in legal proceedings. The definition of "document" is relevant in determining what constitutes "evidence."  
\* \*\*Cheating (Section 415):\*\* Cheating involves deceiving someone and dishonestly inducing them to deliver property or valuable security. Documents can be used as tools for deception in cheating cases.  
\* \*\*Defamation (Sections 499-502):\*\* Defamation can be committed through written or printed material, which falls under the definition of "document."  
  
  
\*\*Judicial Interpretations:\*\*  
  
Over time, judicial pronouncements have further clarified and expanded the scope of “document” under Section 19, particularly with regard to electronic evidence. These interpretations have ensured that the law remains relevant in the digital age.  
  
  
\*\*Conclusion:\*\*  
  
Section 19 of the IPC provides a broad and inclusive definition of "document," encompassing various forms of recorded information on any substance. The definition emphasizes the potential use of the material as evidence, which is the key distinguishing factor. This definition is crucial for understanding and applying numerous offenses related to forgery, fraud, and the presentation of false evidence. With the advancement of technology, the interpretation of "document" continues to evolve to include electronic forms of information, ensuring the continued relevance of this crucial definition in the modern legal landscape.