

Chapter IV – Prior art

1. General remarks and definition

An invention is to be "considered novel if it is not anticipated by the prior art". The "prior art shall consist of everything which has been made available to the public anywhere in the world by means of written disclosure (including drawings and other illustrations) and which is capable of being of assistance in determining that the claimed invention is or is not new and that it does or does not involve an inventive step (i.e., that it is or is not obvious), provided that the making available to the public occurred prior to the international filing date". The scope of this definition should be noted. There are no restrictions whatsoever as to the geographical location where or the language in which the relevant information was made available to the public; also no age limit is stipulated for the documents or other sources of the information.

Art. 33(2), (3)
Rules 33.1(a), (b)
Rule 64.1

See also ISPE Guidelines 11.01 and ISPE Guidelines 11.12.

The principles to be applied in determining whether other kinds of prior art, e.g. relating to use (which could be introduced e.g. by a third party, see GL/PCT-EPO E-II, ISPE Guidelines 16.57 and PCT/AI section 801), have been made available to the public are governed by Rules 33.1(b) and 64.2.

For the examination of the novelty of claimed subject-matter, see GL/PCT-EPO G-VI. Art. 33(2)

A written description, i.e. a document, should be regarded as made available to the public if, at the relevant date, it was possible for members of the public to gain knowledge of the content of the document and there was no bar of confidentiality restricting the use or dissemination of such knowledge. For instance, German utility models ("Gebrauchsmuster") are already publicly available as of their date of entry in the Register of utility models ("Eintragungstag"), which precedes the date of announcement in the Patent Bulletin ("Bekanntmachung im Patentblatt").

2. Enabling disclosures

The principles as laid down in section G-IV.2 in the Guidelines for Examination in the EPO apply *mutatis mutandis*.

3. Date of filing or priority date as effective date

It should be noted that for the purpose of international preliminary examination all prior art is taken into account which was publicly available before the international filing date or, where a priority has been validly claimed, before the date of priority. It should be remembered that different claims, or different alternatives claimed in one claim, may have different effective dates, i.e. the date of filing or (one of) the claimed priority date(s). The question of novelty must be considered against each claim (or part of a claim where a claim specifies a number of alternatives), and prior art in relation to one claim or one part of a claim may include matter, e.g. an intermediate document (see GL/PCT-EPO B-X.9.2.4), which cannot be cited against another claim or another alternative in the same claim because it has an earlier effective date.

Rule 64.1(a), (b)
GL/ISPE 11.24-11.26