



## Designation: D638 – 22

# Standard Test Method for Tensile Properties of Plastics<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D638; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon ( $\epsilon$ ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

*This standard has been approved for use by agencies of the U.S. Department of Defense.*

## 1. Scope\*

1.1 This test method covers the determination of the tensile properties of unreinforced and reinforced plastics in the form of standard dumbbell-shaped test specimens when tested under defined conditions of pretreatment, temperature, humidity, and testing machine speed.

1.2 This test method is applicable for testing materials of any thickness up to 14 mm (0.55 in.). However, for testing specimens in the form of thin sheeting, including film less than 1.0 mm (0.04 in.) in thickness, ASTM standard D882 is the preferred test method. Materials with a thickness greater than 14 mm (0.55 in.) shall be reduced by machining.

1.3 This test method includes the option of determining Poisson's ratio at room temperature.

NOTE 1—This standard and ISO 527-1 address the same subject matter, but differ in technical content.

NOTE 2—This test method is not intended to cover precise physical procedures. It is recognized that the constant rate of crosshead movement type of test leaves much to be desired from a theoretical standpoint, that wide differences may exist between rate of crosshead movement and rate of strain between gage marks on the specimen, and that the testing speeds specified disguise important effects characteristic of materials in the plastic state. Further, it is realized that variations in the thicknesses of test specimens, which are permitted by these procedures, produce variations in the surface-volume ratios of such specimens, and that these variations may influence the test results. Hence, where directly comparable results are desired, all samples should be of equal thickness. Special additional tests should be used where more precise physical data are needed.

NOTE 3—This test method may be used for testing phenolic molded resin or laminated materials. However, where these materials are used as electrical insulation, such materials should be tested in accordance with Test Methods D229 and Test Method D651.

NOTE 4—For tensile properties of resin-matrix composites reinforced with oriented continuous or discontinuous high modulus >20-GPa ( $>3.0 \times 10^6$ -psi) fibers, tests shall be made in accordance with Test Method D3039/D3039M.

1.4 Test data obtained by this test method have been found to be useful in engineering design. However, it is important to

consider the precautions and limitations of this method found in Note 2 and Section 4 before considering these data for engineering design.

1.5 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses are for information only.

1.6 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

1.7 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

## 2. Referenced Documents

### 2.1 ASTM Standards:<sup>2</sup>

- D229 Test Methods for Rigid Sheet and Plate Materials Used for Electrical Insulation  
D412 Test Methods for Vulcanized Rubber and Thermoplastic Elastomers—Tension  
D618 Practice for Conditioning Plastics for Testing  
D651 Test Method for Test for Tensile Strength of Molded Electrical Insulating Materials (Withdrawn 1989)<sup>3</sup>  
D882 Test Method for Tensile Properties of Thin Plastic Sheeting  
D883 Terminology Relating to Plastics  
D1822 Test Method for Determining the Tensile-Impact Resistance of Plastics  
D3039/D3039M Test Method for Tensile Properties of Polymer Matrix Composite Materials  
D4000 Classification System for Specifying Plastic Materials

<sup>1</sup> This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D20 on Plastics and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D20.10 on Mechanical Properties.

Current edition approved July 1, 2022. Published July 2022. Originally approved in 1941. Last previous edition approved in 2014 as D638 - 14. DOI: 10.1520/D0638-22.

<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For Annual Book of ASTM Standards volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

<sup>3</sup> The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

\*A Summary of Changes section appears at the end of this standard

D4066 Classification System for Nylon Injection and Extrusion Materials (PA)

D5947 Test Methods for Physical Dimensions of Solid Plastics Specimens

E4 Practices for Force Calibration and Verification of Testing Machines

E83 Practice for Verification and Classification of Extensometer Systems

E132 Test Method for Poisson's Ratio at Room Temperature

E456 Terminology Relating to Quality and Statistics

E691 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Study to Determine the Precision of a Test Method

E2935 Practice for Evaluating Equivalence of Two Testing Processes

2.2 ISO Standard:<sup>4</sup>

ISO 527-1 Determination of Tensile Properties

### 3. Terminology

3.1 Terms used in this standard are defined in accordance with Terminology D883, and Annex A2. For terms relating to precision and bias and associated issues, the terms used in this standard are defined in accordance with Terminology E456.

### 4. Significance and Use

4.1 This test method is designed to produce tensile property data for the control and specification of plastic materials. These data are also useful for qualitative characterization and for research and development.

4.2 Some material specifications that require the use of this test method, but with some procedural modifications that take precedence when adhering to the specification. Therefore, it is advisable to refer to that material specification before using this test method. Table 1 in Classification D4000 lists the ASTM materials standards that currently exist.

4.3 Tensile properties are known to vary with specimen preparation and with speed and environment of testing. Consequently, where precise comparative results are desired, these factors must be carefully controlled.

4.4 It is realized that a material cannot be tested without also testing the method of preparation of that material. Hence, when comparative tests of materials per se are desired, exercise great care to ensure that all samples are prepared in exactly the same way, unless the test is to include the effects of sample preparation. Similarly, for referee purposes or comparisons within any given series of specimens, care shall be taken to secure the maximum degree of uniformity in details of preparation, treatment, and handling.

4.5 Tensile properties provide useful data for plastics engineering design purposes. However, because of the high degree of sensitivity exhibited by many plastics to rate of straining and environmental conditions, data obtained by this test method cannot be considered valid for applications involving load-time scales or environments widely different from those of this test method. In cases of such dissimilarity, no reliable estimation of

the limit of usefulness can be made for most plastics. This sensitivity to rate of straining and environment necessitates testing over a broad load-time scale (including impact and creep) and range of environmental conditions if tensile properties are to suffice for engineering design purposes.

NOTE 5—Since the existence of a true elastic limit in plastics (as in many other organic materials and in many metals) is debatable, the propriety of applying the term "elastic modulus" in its quoted, generally accepted definition to describe the "stiffness" or "rigidity" of a plastic has been seriously questioned. The exact stress-strain characteristics of plastic materials are highly dependent on such factors as rate of application of stress, temperature, previous history of specimen, etc. However, stress-strain curves for plastics, determined as described in this test method, almost always show a linear region at low stresses, and a straight line drawn tangent to this portion of the curve permits calculation of an elastic modulus of the usually defined type. Such a constant is useful if its arbitrary nature and dependence on time, temperature, and similar factors are realized.

### 5. Apparatus

5.1 *Testing Machine*—A testing machine of the constant-rate-of-crosshead-movement type and comprising essentially the following:

5.1.1 *Fixed Member*—A fixed or essentially stationary member carrying one grip.

5.1.2 *Movable Member*—A movable member carrying a second grip.

5.1.3 *Grips*—Grips for holding the test specimen between the fixed member and the movable member of the testing machine can be either the fixed or self-aligning type.

5.1.3.1 Fixed grips are rigidly attached to the fixed and movable members of the testing machine. When this type of grip is used take extreme care to ensure that the test specimen is inserted and clamped so that the long axis of the test specimen coincides with the direction of pull through the center line of the grip assembly.

5.1.3.2 Self-aligning grips are attached to the fixed and movable members of the testing machine in such a manner that they will move freely into alignment as soon as any load is applied so that the long axis of the test specimen will coincide with the direction of the applied pull through the center line of the grip assembly. Align the specimens as perfectly as possible with the direction of pull so that no rotary motion that may induce slippage will occur in the grips; there is a limit to the amount of misalignment self-aligning grips will accommodate.

5.1.3.3 The test specimen shall be held in such a way that slippage relative to the grips is prevented insofar as possible. Grip surfaces that are deeply scored or serrated with a pattern similar to those of a coarse single-cut file, serrations about 2.4 mm (0.09 in.) apart and about 1.6 mm (0.06 in.) deep, have been found satisfactory for most thermoplastics. Finer serrations have been found to be more satisfactory for harder plastics, such as the thermosetting materials. It is important that the serrations be kept clean and sharp. Should breaking in the grips occur, even when deep serrations or abraded specimen surfaces are used, other techniques shall be used. Other techniques that have been found useful, particularly with smooth-faced grips, are abrading that portion of the surface of the specimen that will be in the grips, and interposing thin

<sup>4</sup> Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

pieces of abrasive cloth, abrasive paper, or plastic, or rubber-coated fabric, commonly called hospital sheeting, between the specimen and the grip surface. No. 80 double-sided abrasive paper has been found effective in many cases. An open-mesh fabric, in which the threads are coated with abrasive, has also been effective. Reducing the cross-sectional area of the specimen may also be effective. The use of special types of grips is sometimes necessary to eliminate slippage and breakage in the grips.

**5.1.4 Drive Mechanism**—A drive mechanism for imparting a uniform, controlled velocity to the movable member with respect to the stationary member. This velocity is to be regulated as specified in Section 8.

**5.1.5 Load Indicator**—A suitable load-indicating mechanism capable of showing the total tensile load carried by the test specimen when held by the grips. This mechanism shall be essentially free of inertia lag at the specified rate of testing and shall indicate the load with an accuracy of  $\pm 1\%$  of the indicated value, or better. The accuracy of the testing machine shall be verified in accordance with Practices E4.

**NOTE 6**—Experience has shown that many testing machines now in use are incapable of maintaining accuracy for as long as the periods between inspection recommended in Practices E4. Hence, it is recommended that each machine be studied individually and verified as often as may be found necessary. It frequently will be necessary to perform this function daily.

**5.1.6** The fixed member, movable member, drive mechanism, and grips shall be constructed of such materials and in such proportions that the total elastic longitudinal strain of the system constituted by these parts does not exceed 1 % of the total longitudinal strain between the two gage marks on the test specimen at any time during the test and at any load up to the rated capacity of the machine.

**5.1.7 Crosshead Extension Indicator**—A suitable extension indicating mechanism capable of showing the amount of change in the separation of the grips, that is, crosshead movement. This mechanism shall be essentially free of inertial lag at the specified rate of testing and shall indicate the crosshead movement with an accuracy of  $\pm 10\%$  of the indicated value.

**5.2 Extension Indicator** (extensometer)—A suitable instrument shall be used for determining the distance between two designated points within the gauge length of the test specimen as the specimen is stretched. For referee purposes, the extensometer must be set at the full gage length of the specimen, as shown in Fig. 1. It is desirable, but not essential, that this instrument automatically record this distance, or any change in it, as a function of the load on the test specimen or of the elapsed time from the start of the test, or both. If only the latter is obtained, load-time data must also be taken. This instrument shall be essentially free of inertia at the specified speed of testing. Extensometers shall be classified, and their calibration periodically verified in accordance with Practice E83.

**5.2.1 Modulus-of-Elasticity Measurements**—For modulus-of-elasticity measurements, an extensometer with a maximum strain error of 0.0002 mm/mm (in./in.) that automatically and continuously records shall be used. An extensometer classified by Practice E83 as fulfilling the requirements of a B-2

classification within the range of use for modulus measurements meets this requirement.

**5.2.2 Low-Extension Measurements**—For elongation-at-yield and low-extension measurements (nominally 20 % or less), the same above extensometer, attenuated to 20 % extension, is acceptable. In any case, the extensometer system must meet at least Class C (Practice E83) requirements, which include a fixed strain error of 0.001 strain or  $\pm 1.0\%$  of the indicated strain, whichever is greater.

**5.2.3 High-Extension Measurements**—For making measurements at elongations greater than 20 %, measuring techniques with error no greater than  $\pm 10\%$  of the measured value are acceptable.

**5.3 Micrometers**—Apparatus for measuring the width and thickness of the test specimen shall comply with the requirements of Test Method D5947.

## 6. Test Specimens

### 6.1 Sheet, Plate, and Molded Plastics:

**6.1.1 Rigid and Semirigid Plastics**—The test specimen shall conform to the dimensions shown in Fig. 1. The Type I specimen is the preferred specimen and shall be used where sufficient material having a thickness of 7 mm (0.28 in.) or less is available. The Type II specimen is recommended when a material does not break in the narrow section with the preferred Type I specimen. The Type V specimen shall be used where only limited material having a thickness of 4 mm (0.16 in.) or less is available for evaluation, or where a large number of specimens are to be exposed in a limited space (thermal and environmental stability tests, etc.). The Type IV specimen is generally used when direct comparisons are required between materials in different rigidity cases (that is, nonrigid and semirigid). The Type III specimen must be used for all materials with a thickness of greater than 7 mm (0.28 in.) but not more than 14 mm (0.55 in.).

**6.1.2 Nonrigid Plastics**—The test specimen shall conform to the dimensions shown in Fig. 1. The Type IV specimen shall be used for testing nonrigid plastics with a thickness of 4 mm (0.16 in.) or less. The Type III specimen must be used for all materials with a thickness greater than 7 mm (0.28 in.) but not more than 14 mm (0.55 in.).

**6.1.3 Reinforced Composites**—The test specimen for reinforced composites, including highly orthotropic laminates, shall conform to the dimensions of the Type I specimen shown in Fig. 1.

**6.1.4 Preparation**—Methods of preparing test specimens include injection molding, machining operations, or die cutting, from materials in sheet, plate, slab, or similar form. Materials thicker than 14 mm (0.55 in.) shall be machined to 14 mm (0.55 in.) for use as Type III specimens.

**NOTE 7**—Test results have shown that for some materials such as glass cloth, SMC, and BMC laminates, other specimen types should be considered to ensure breakage within the gage length of the specimen, as mandated by 7.3.

**NOTE 8**—When preparing specimens from certain composite laminates such as woven roving, or glass cloth, exercise care in cutting the specimens parallel to the reinforcement. The reinforcement will be significantly weakened by cutting on a bias, resulting in lower laminate properties, unless testing of specimens in a direction other than parallel