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**Information technology — Coding of
audio-visual objects —**

**Part 3:
Audio**

*Technologies de l'information — Codage des objets audiovisuels —
Partie 3: Codage audio*



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Foreword

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0 Introduction

0.1 Overview

ISO/IEC 14496-3 (MPEG-4 Audio) is a new kind of audio standard that integrates many different types of audio coding: natural sound with synthetic sound, low bitrate delivery with high-quality delivery, speech with music, complex soundtracks with simple ones, and traditional content with interactive and virtual-reality content. By standardizing individually sophisticated coding tools as well as a novel, flexible framework for audio synchronization, mixing, and downloaded post-production, the developers of the MPEG-4 Audio standard have created new technology for a new, interactive world of digital audio.

MPEG-4, unlike previous audio standards created by ISO/IEC and other groups, does not target a single application such as real-time telephony or high-quality audio compression. Rather, MPEG-4 Audio is a standard that applies to every application requiring the use of advanced sound compression, synthesis, manipulation, or playback. The subparts that follow specify the state-of-the-art coding tools in several domains; however, MPEG-4 Audio is more than just the sum of its parts. As the tools described here are integrated with the rest of the MPEG-4 standard, exciting new possibilities for object-based audio coding, interactive presentation, dynamic soundtracks, and other sorts of new media, are enabled.

Since a single set of tools is used to cover the needs of a broad range of applications, *interoperability* is a natural feature of systems that depend on the MPEG-4 Audio standard. A system that uses a particular coder — for example a real-time voice communication system making use of the MPEG-4 speech coding toolset — can easily share data and development tools with other systems, even in different domains, that use the same tool — for example a voicemail indexing and retrieval system making use of MPEG-4 speech coding.

The remainder of this clause gives a more detailed overview of the capabilities and functioning of MPEG-4 Audio. First a discussion of concepts, that have changed since the MPEG-2 audio standards, is presented. Then the MPEG-4 Audio toolset is outlined.

0.2 Concepts of MPEG-4 Audio

0.2.1 General

As with previous MPEG standards, MPEG-4 does not standardize methods for encoding sound. Thus, content authors are left to their own decisions as to the best method of creating bitstream payloads. At the present time, methods to automatically convert natural sound into synthetic or multi-object descriptions are not mature; therefore, most immediate solutions will involve interactively-authoring the content stream in some way. This process is similar to current schemes for MIDI-based and multi-channel mixdown authoring of soundtracks.

Many concepts in MPEG-4 Audio are different than those in previous MPEG Audio standards. For the benefit of readers who are familiar with MPEG-1 and MPEG-2 we provide a brief overview here.

0.2.2 Audio storage and transport facilities

In all of the MPEG-4 tools for audio coding, the coding standard ends at the point of constructing access units that contain the compressed data. The MPEG-4 Systems (ISO/IEC 14496-1) specification describes how to convert these individually coded access units into elementary streams.

There is no standard transport mechanism of these elementary streams over a channel. This is because the broad range of applications that can make use of MPEG-4 technology have delivery requirements that are too wide to easily characterize with a single solution. Rather, what is standardized is an interface (the Delivery Multimedia Interface Format, or DMIF, specified in ISO/IEC 14496-6) that describes the capabilities of a transport layer and the communication between transport, multiplex, and demultiplex functions in encoders and decoders. The use of DMIF and the MPEG-4 Systems specification allows transmission functions that are much more sophisticated than are possible with previous MPEG standards.

However, LATM and LOAS were defined to provide a low overhead audio multiplex and transport mechanism for natural audio applications, which do not require sophisticated object-based coding or other functions provided by MPEG-4 Systems.