

Use of the key words “MUST” and “SHOULD” in Supplemental Guidance for IDEF Requirements

The Supplemental Guidance can provide two different kinds of information related to an individual IDEF Requirement for prospective Identity Ecosystem participants (“participants”):

- Explanatory material and references intended to more fully describe the scope, background, or intent of the Requirement. For instance, it may help participants determine whether or not the individual IDEF Requirement applies to them.
- Detailed supplemental requirement statements to enable participants to determine whether or not they conform to the individual IDEF Requirement.

Organize and present the Supplemental Guidance in a way which makes it as simple and clear as possible for participants to determine applicability and conformance. It is particularly important for participants to be able to clearly distinguish between explanatory material and detailed supplemental requirement statements. In general, this can be accomplished by presenting the two kinds of information in separate sections or paragraphs. At a minimum, present a supplemental requirement statement in a separate sentence. In addition, it is critical to use “key words” as markers to clearly identify supplemental requirement statements.

The key words “MUST” and “SHOULD” (using capitalization – not enclosed in quotation marks) are to be used to clearly identify supplemental requirement items which are intended to be evaluated by a participant to determine conformance. These words are intended to be interpreted as follows:*

- **MUST** This word means that the item is an absolute requirement. The terms "REQUIRED" or "SHALL" have the same meaning. Participants who cannot state that they conform to this item in the Supplemental Guidance cannot state that they conform to the individual IDEF Requirement as a whole.
- **SHOULD** This word means that there may exist valid reasons in particular circumstances to ignore a particular item, but the full implications must be understood and carefully weighed before choosing a different course. The adjective "RECOMMENDED" has the same meaning. Participants who cannot state that they conform to this item in the Supplemental Guidance may still be able to state that they conform to the individual IDEF Requirement as a whole.
- **NOT** – where this is used with a key word, it must be capitalized (e.g., “MUST NOT”)

In explanatory material, avoid using the word “must” (lower case). Do not use capitalized key words in explanatory material. Capitalized keywords are to be used only in a supplemental requirement statement.

NOTE: This document is primarily intended to address the Supplemental Guidance for the IDEF Requirements. For the IDEF Best Practices, the use of the key word “MUST” in the Supplemental Guidance is inappropriate.

*based closely on IETF RFC 2119