
Microstructure of cast irons —
Part 1:
Graphite classification by visual
analysis

Microstructure des fontes —

Partie 1: Classification du graphite par analyse visuelle



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Published in Switzerland

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 25, *Cast irons and pig irons*.

This third edition cancels and replaces the second edition (ISO 945-1:2017), of which it constitutes a minor revision. The changes compared with the previous edition are as follows:

- [Figures 3](#) and [4](#) have been corrected to a diameter of 120 mm to allow a direct comparison with the microscope display screen;
- [Figures 3](#) and [4](#) have been corrected so that the maximum graphite sizes conform with [Table 1](#).

A list of all parts in the ISO 945 series can be found on the ISO website.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Microstructure designation is a useful feature that provides a means of classifying the graphite form, distribution and size in cast irons.

Graphite classification by visual analysis is a well-established method which is well recognized within the foundry industry as a means of quickly determining the overall graphite microstructure of a cast iron casting.

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Microstructure of cast irons —

Part 1: Graphite classification by visual analysis

1 Scope

This document specifies a method of classifying the microstructure of graphite in cast irons by comparative visual analysis.

The purpose of this document is to provide information about the method of graphite classification. It is not intended to give information on the suitability of cast-iron types and grades for any particular application.

The particular material grades are specified mainly by mechanical properties and, in the case of austenitic and abrasion resistant cast irons, by their chemical composition. The interpretation of graphite form and size does not allow a statistically valid statement on the fulfilment of the requirements specified in the relevant material standard.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

No terms and definitions are listed in this document.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

4 General

4.1 Designation system for classifying graphite in cast irons

When cast iron materials are examined under a microscope in accordance with this document, the graphite shall be classified by the following:

- a) its form, designated by Roman numbers I to VI (see [Figure 1](#) and [Annex A](#));
- b) its distribution, designated by capital letters A to E (see [Figure 2](#) and [Annex B](#)); the graphite distribution designation is only specified for grey cast irons (form I);
- c) its size, designated by numbers 1 to 8 (see [Figures 3, 4](#) and [5](#) and [Table 1](#)).

NOTE [Figures 1](#) to [5](#) show only the outlines and not the structure of the graphite.

4.2 Form

Magnification $\times 100$

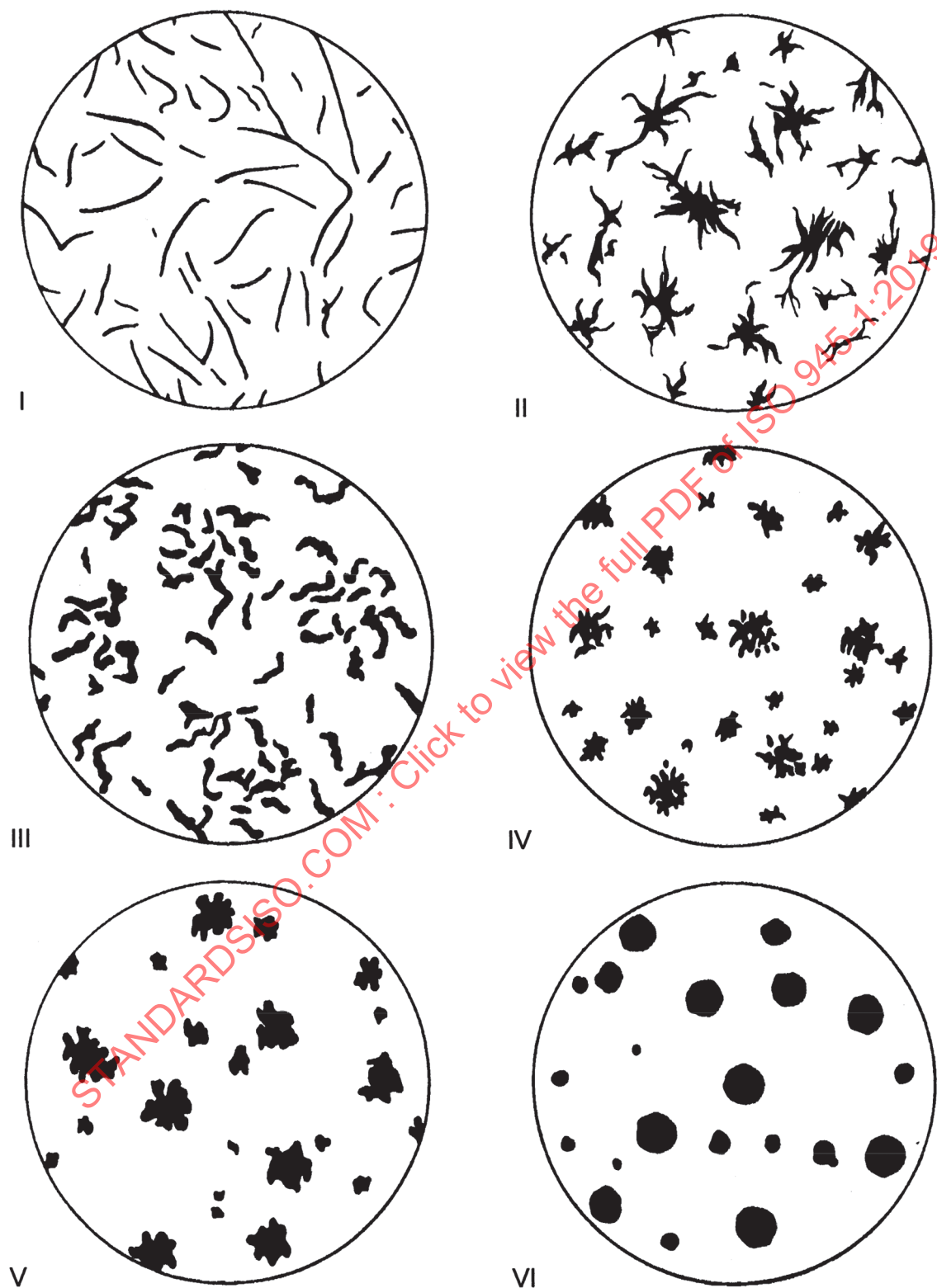


Figure 1 — Reference images for principal graphite forms in cast irons

4.3 Distribution

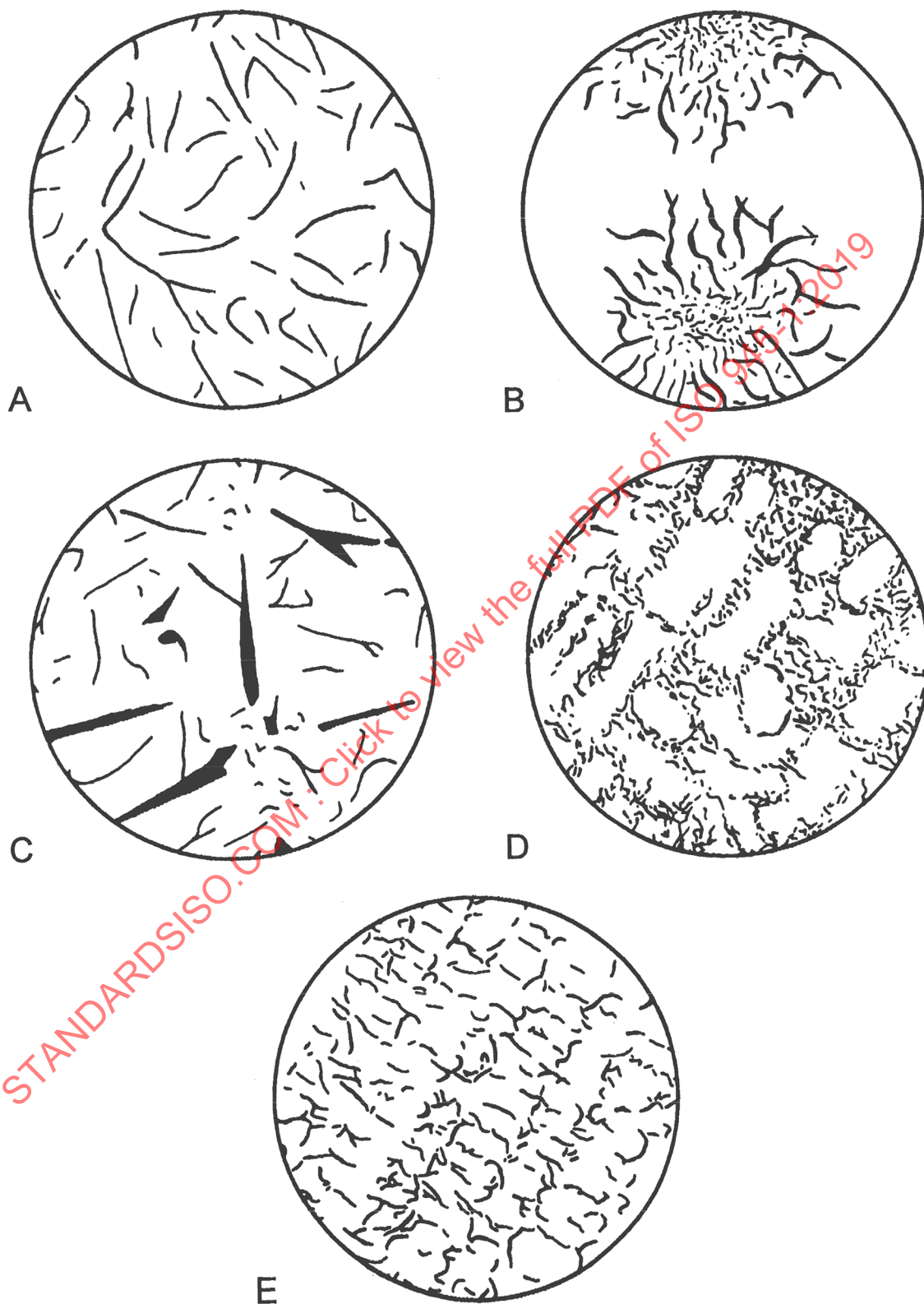
Magnification $\times 100$ 

Figure 2 — Reference images for graphite distribution (form I)

4.4 Size

Magnification $\times 100$



a) Reference image for graphite size 1: ≥ 1 mm (form I)

Magnification $\times 100$



b) Reference image for graphite size 2: 0,5 mm to < 1 mm (form I)

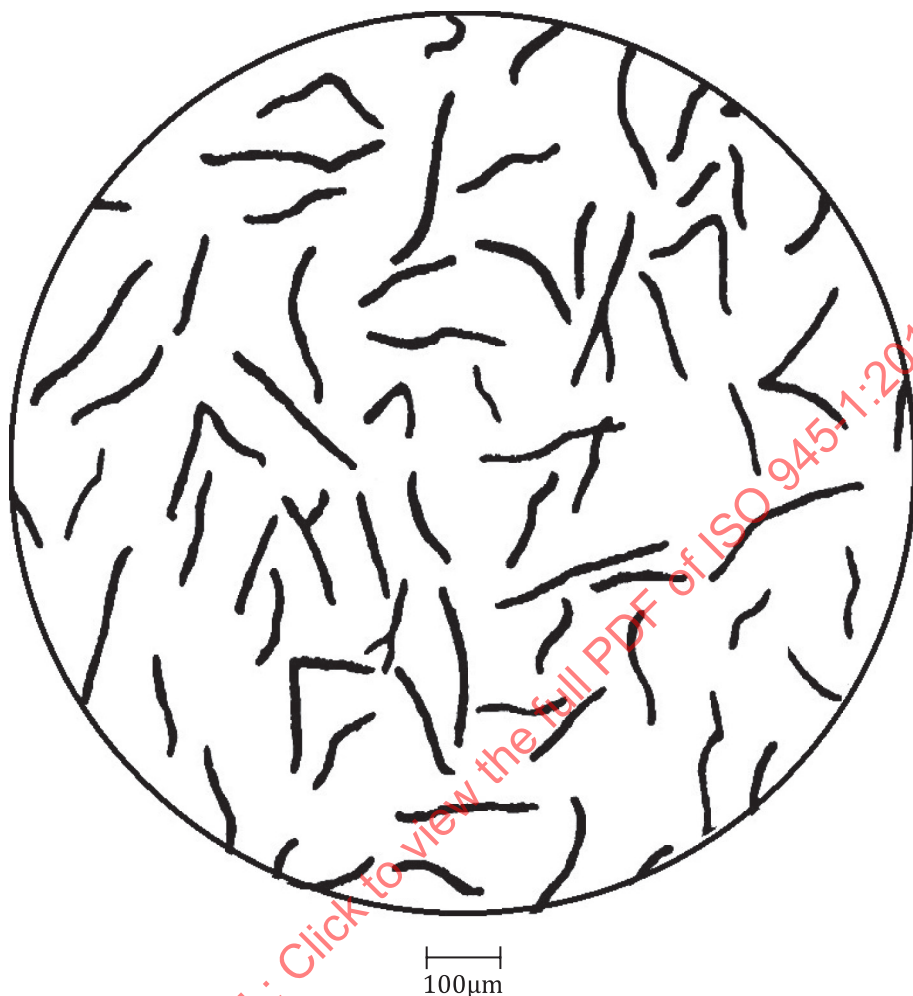
Magnification $\times 100$



100 μm

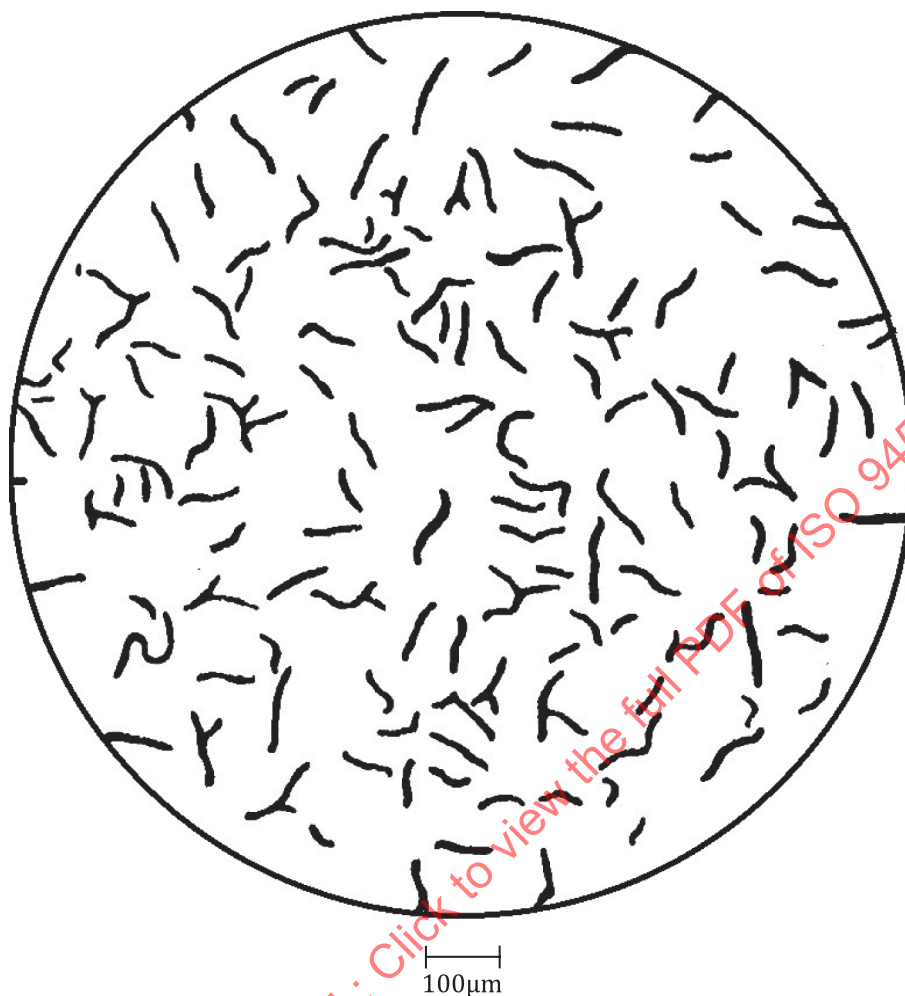
c) Reference image for graphite size 3: 0,25 mm to < 0,5 mm (form I)

Magnification $\times 100$



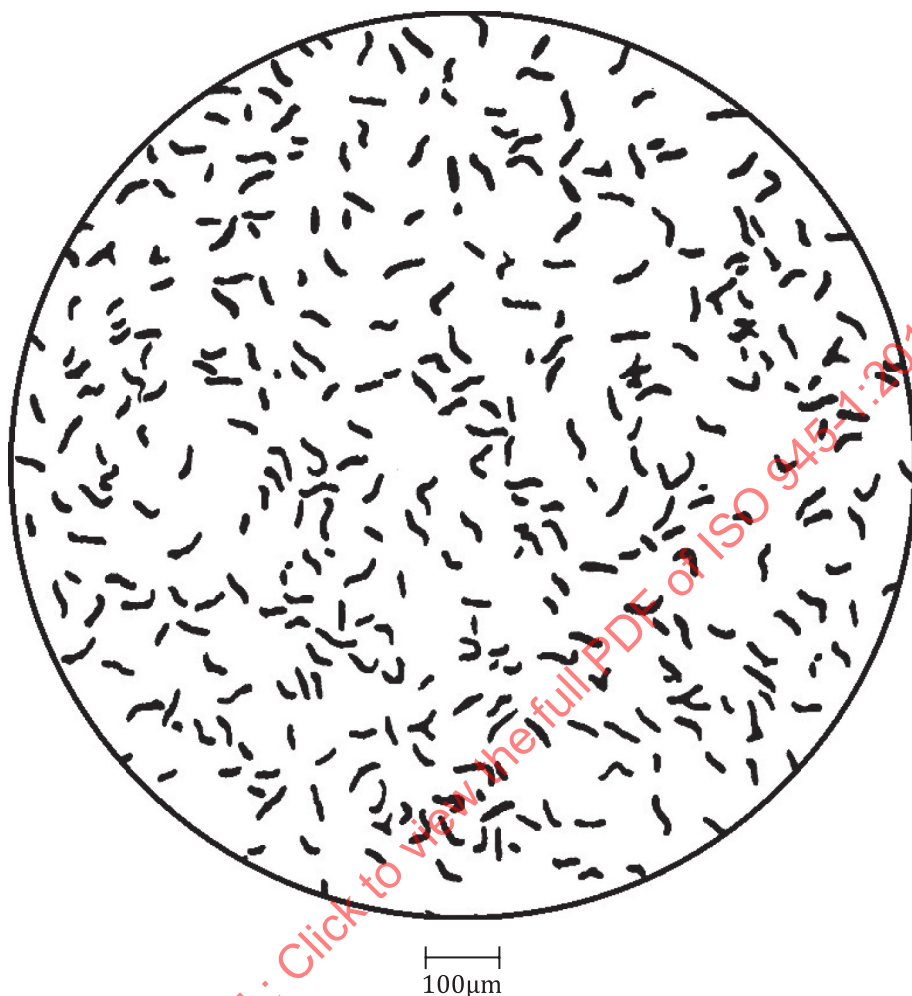
d) Reference image for graphite size 4: 0,12 mm to < 0,25 mm (form I)

Magnification $\times 100$



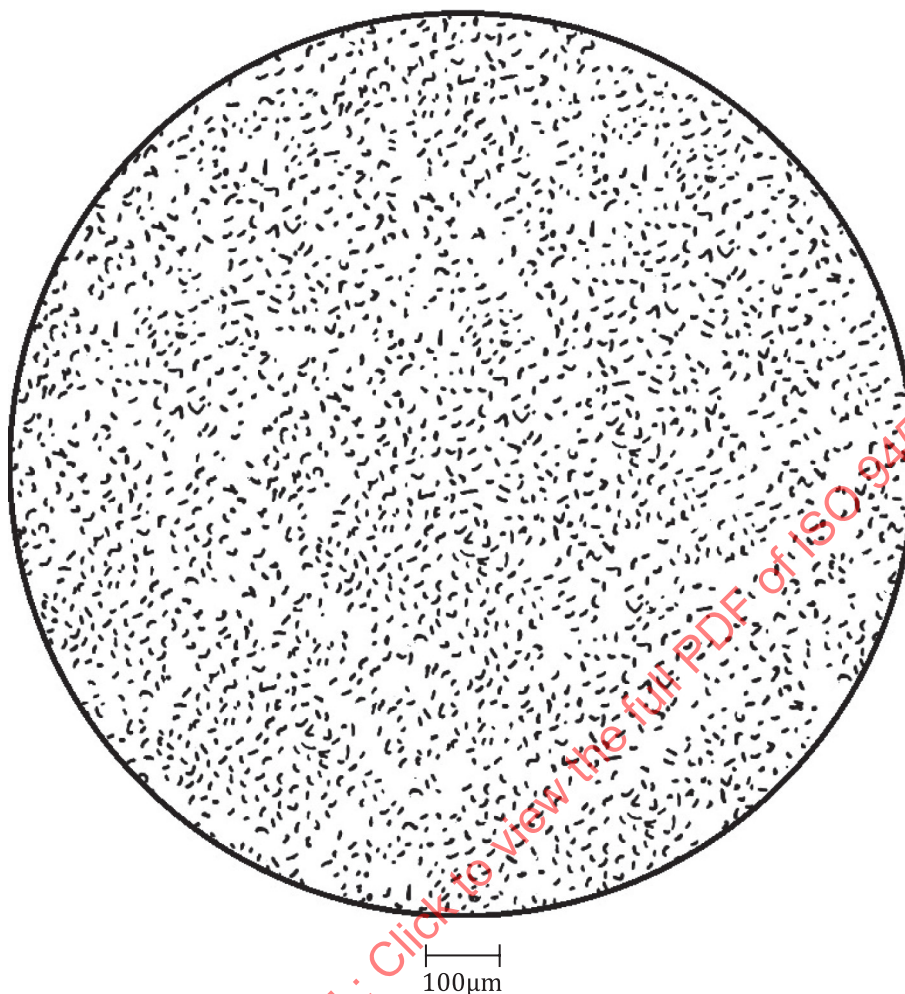
e) Reference image for graphite size 5: 0,06 mm to < 0,12 mm (form I)

Magnification $\times 100$



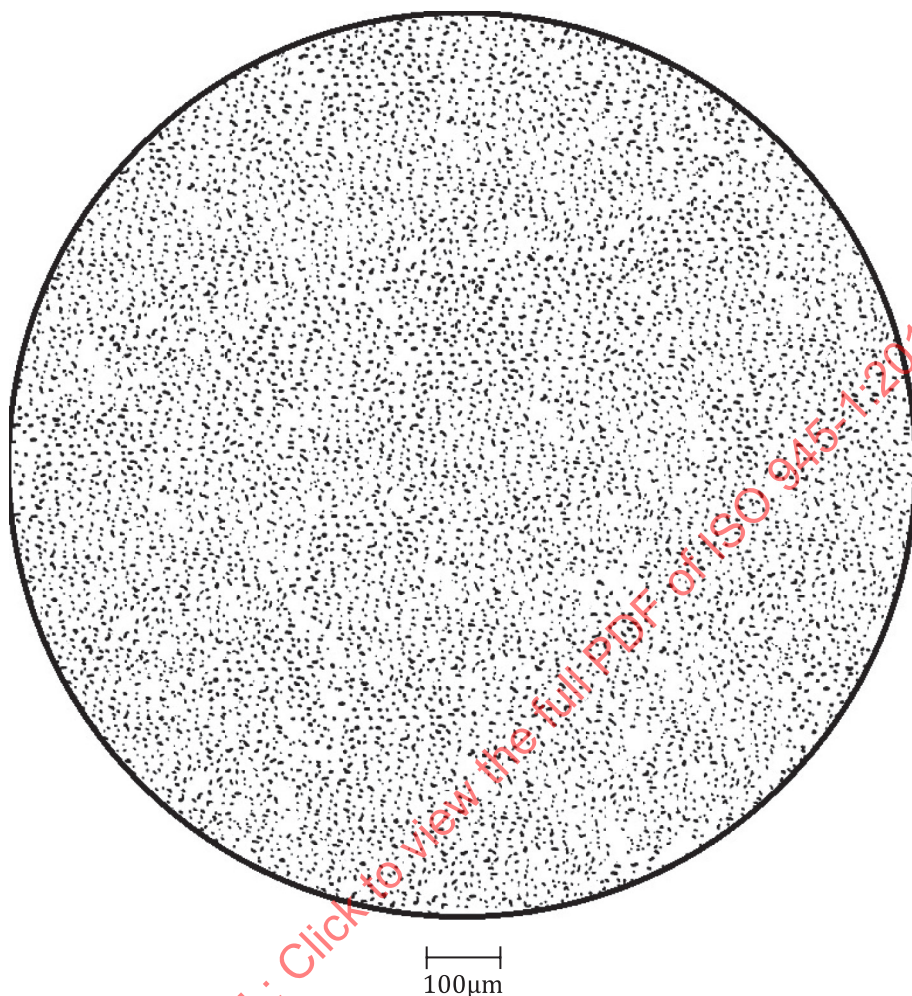
f) Reference image for graphite size 6: 0,03 mm to < 0,06 mm (form I)

Magnification $\times 100$



g) Reference image for graphite size 7: 0,015 mm to < 0,03 mm (form I)

Magnification $\times 100$



h) Reference image for graphite size 8: < 0,015 mm (form I)

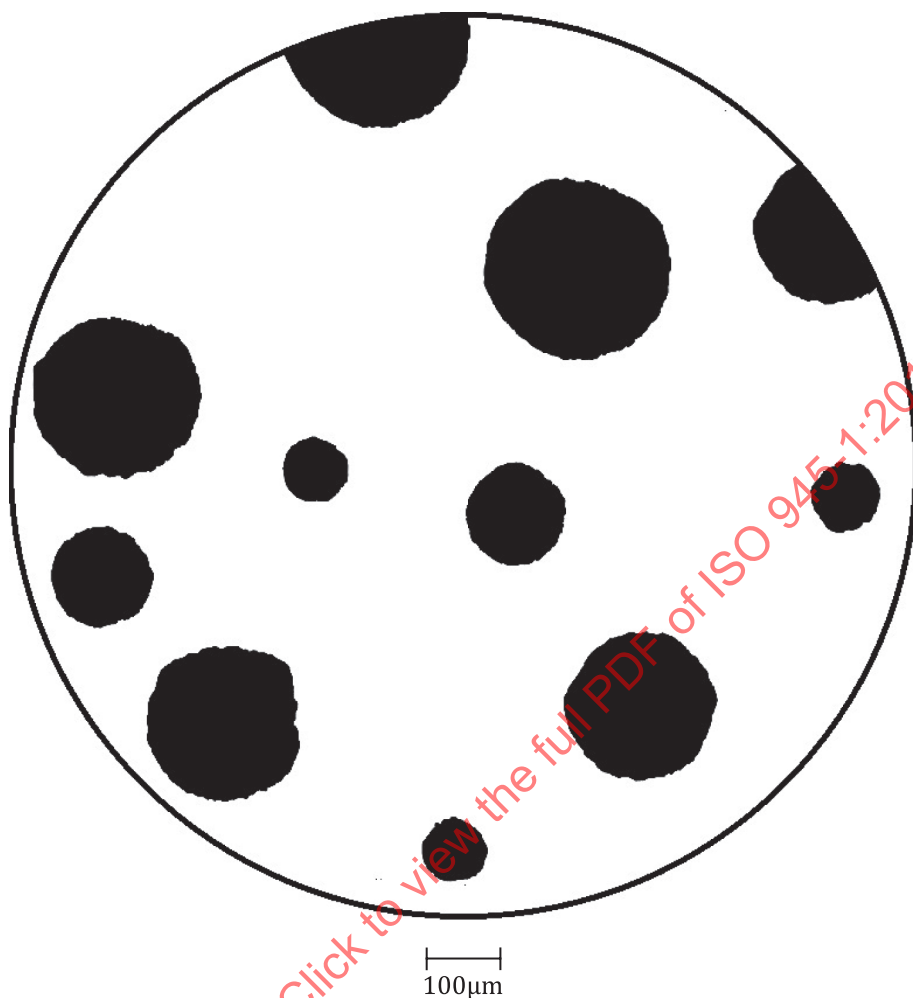
Figure 3 — Reference images for graphite sizes for form I

Magnification $\times 100$



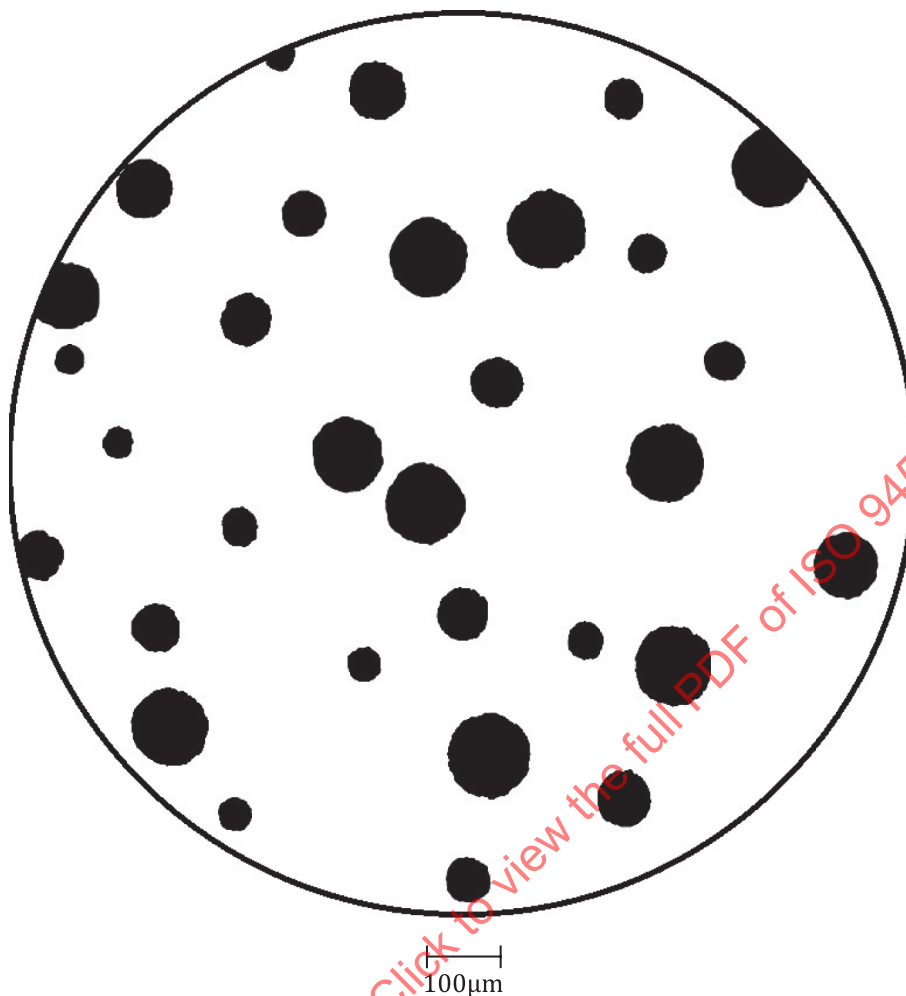
a) Reference image for graphite size 3: 0,25 mm to < 0,5 mm (forms IV to VI)

Magnification $\times 100$



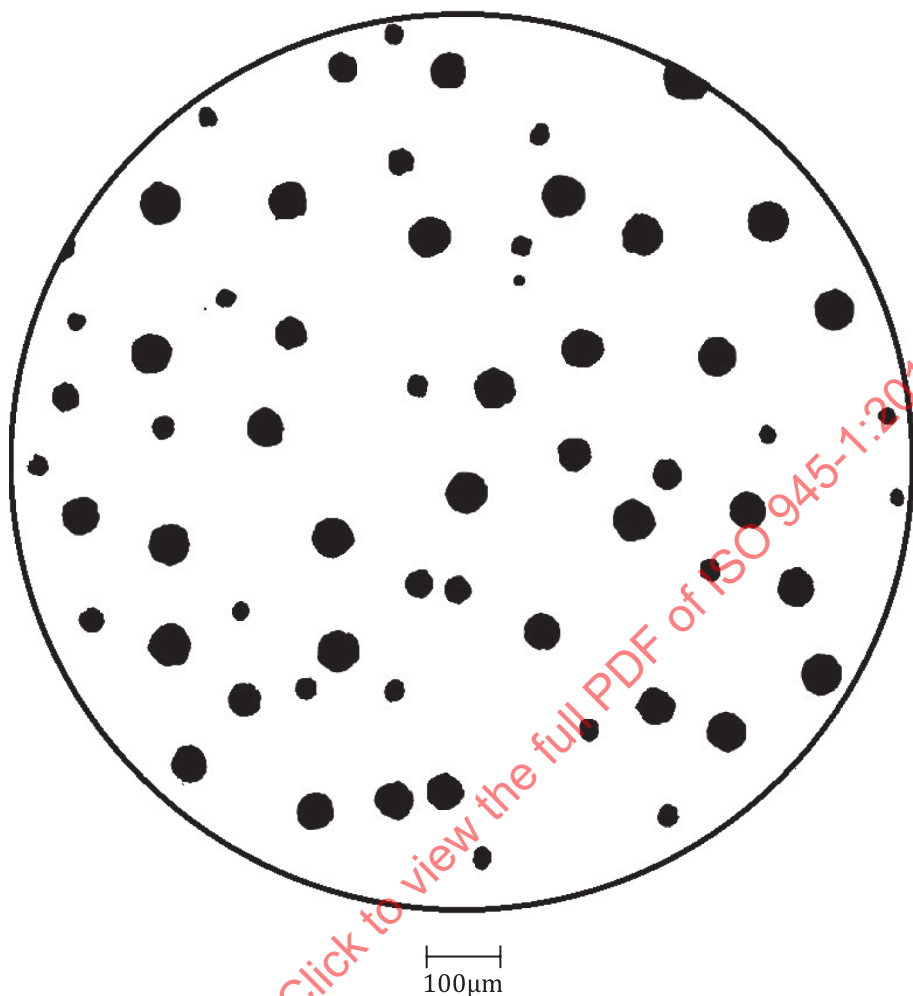
b) Reference image for graphite size 4: 0,12 mm to < 0,25 mm (forms IV to VI)

Magnification $\times 100$



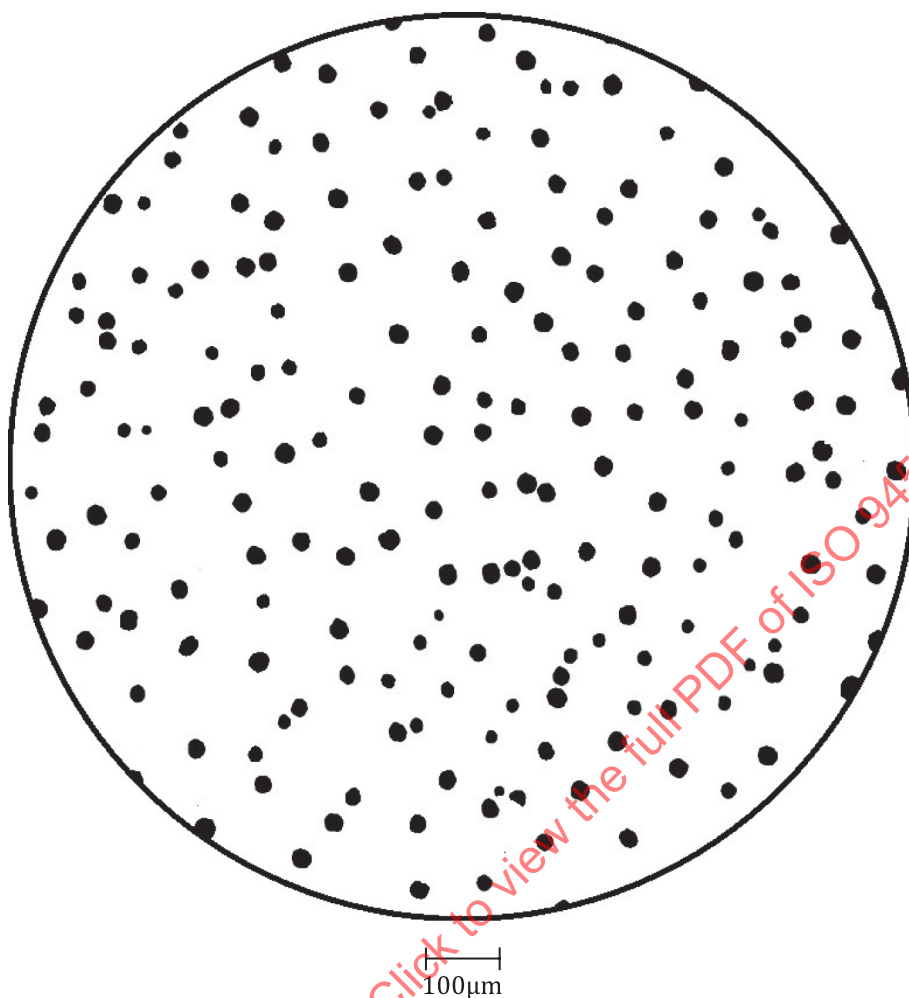
c) Reference image for graphite size 5: 0,06 mm to < 0,12 mm (forms IV to VI)

Magnification $\times 100$



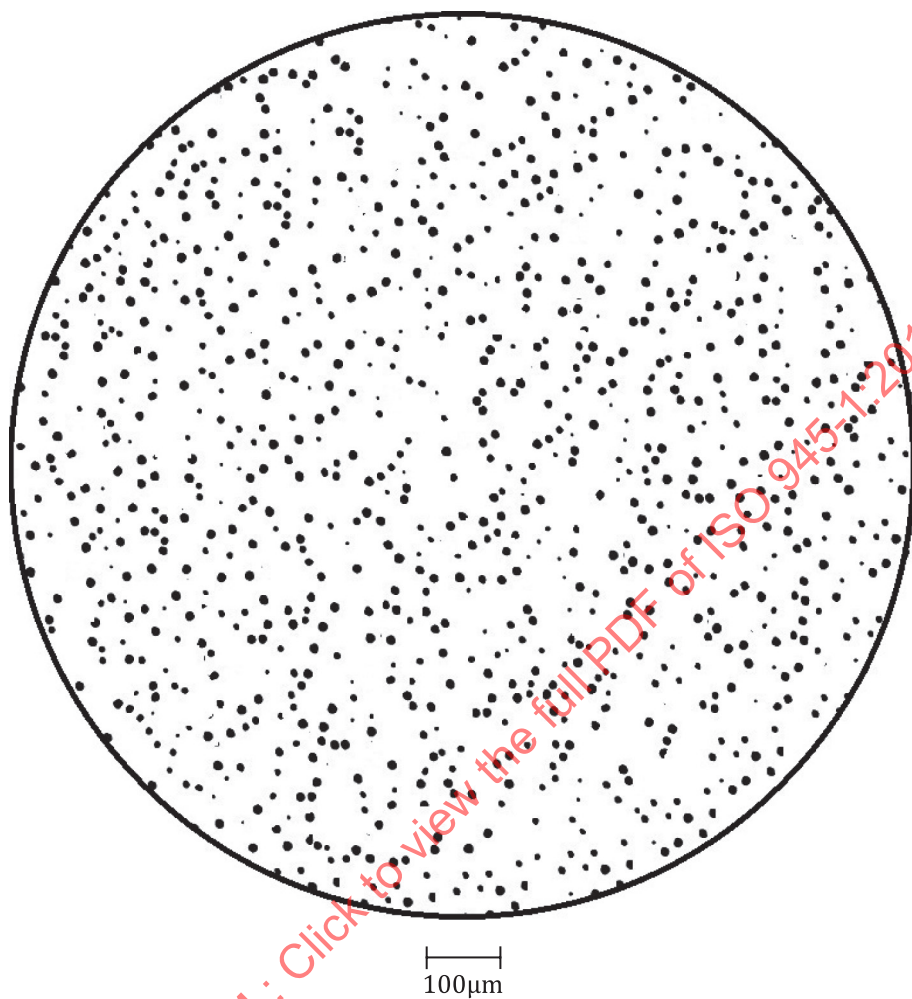
d) Reference image for graphite size 6: 0,03 mm to < 0,06 mm (forms IV to VI)

Magnification $\times 100$



e) Reference image for graphite size 7: 0,015 mm to < 0,03 mm (forms IV to VI)

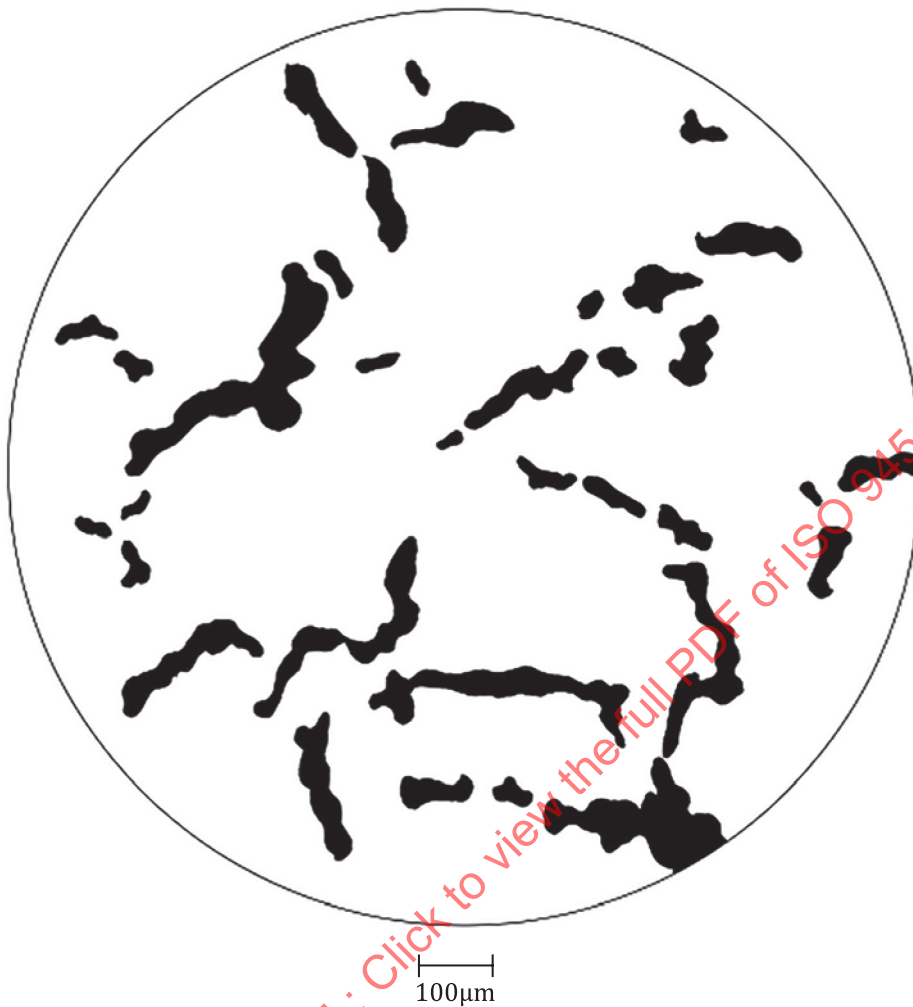
Magnification $\times 100$



f) Reference image for graphite size 8: < 0,015 mm (forms IV to VI)

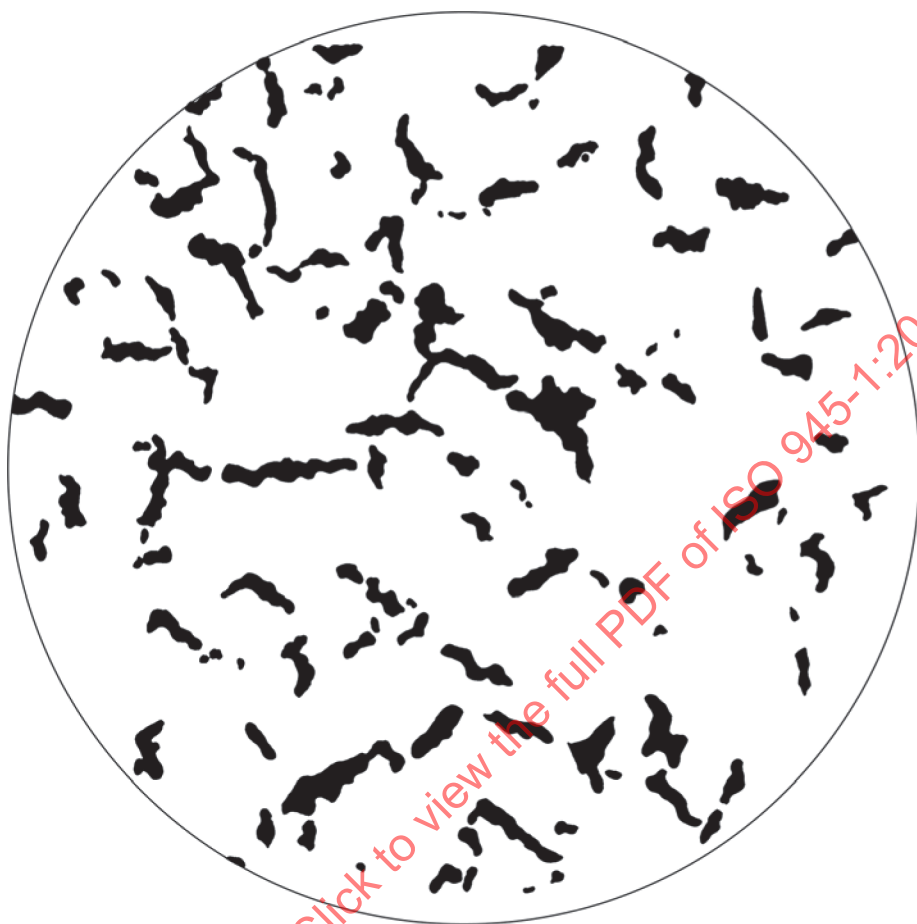
Figure 4 — Reference images for graphite sizes for forms IV to VI

Magnification $\times 100$



a) Reference image for graphite size 3: 0,25 mm to < 0,5 mm (form III)

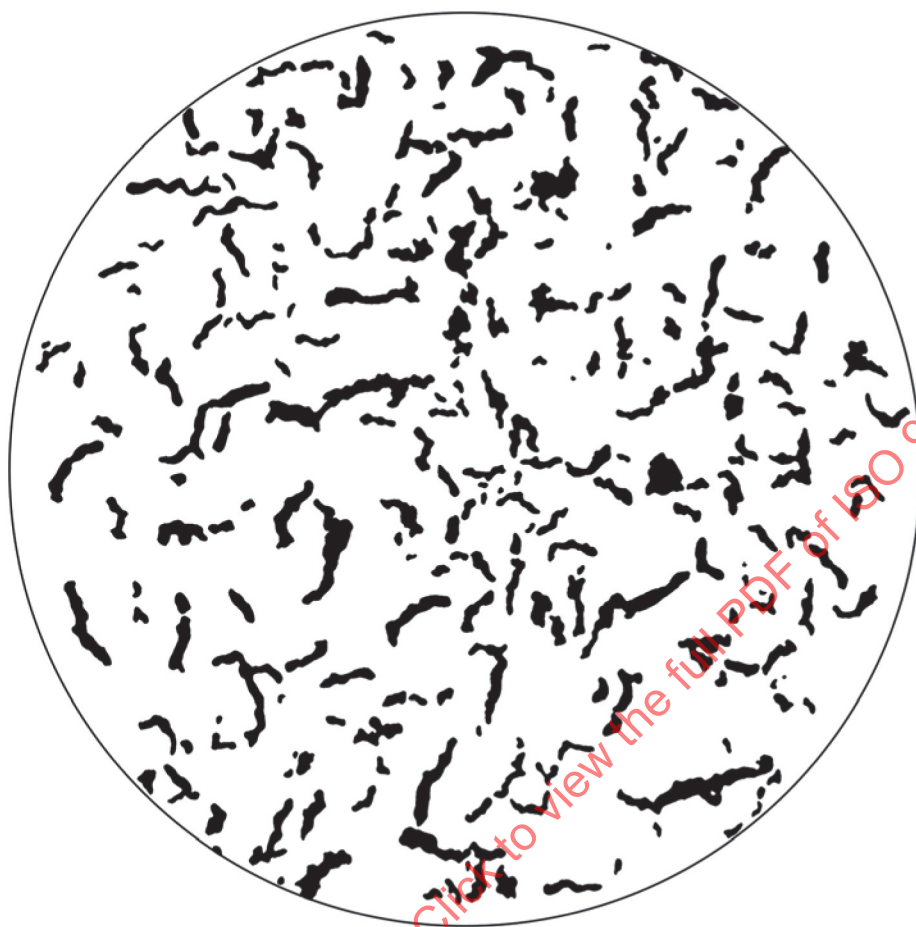
Magnification $\times 100$



100µm

b) Reference image for graphite size 4: 0,12 mm to < 0,25 mm (form III)

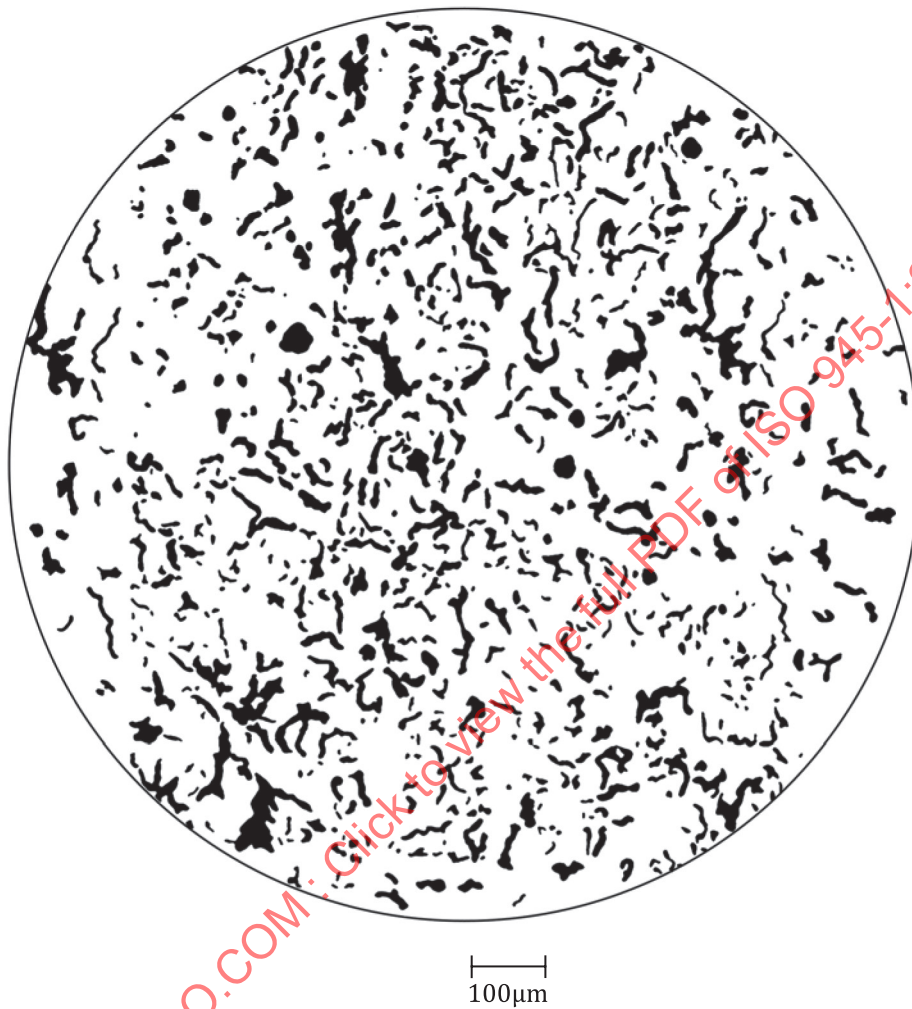
Magnification $\times 100$



100µm

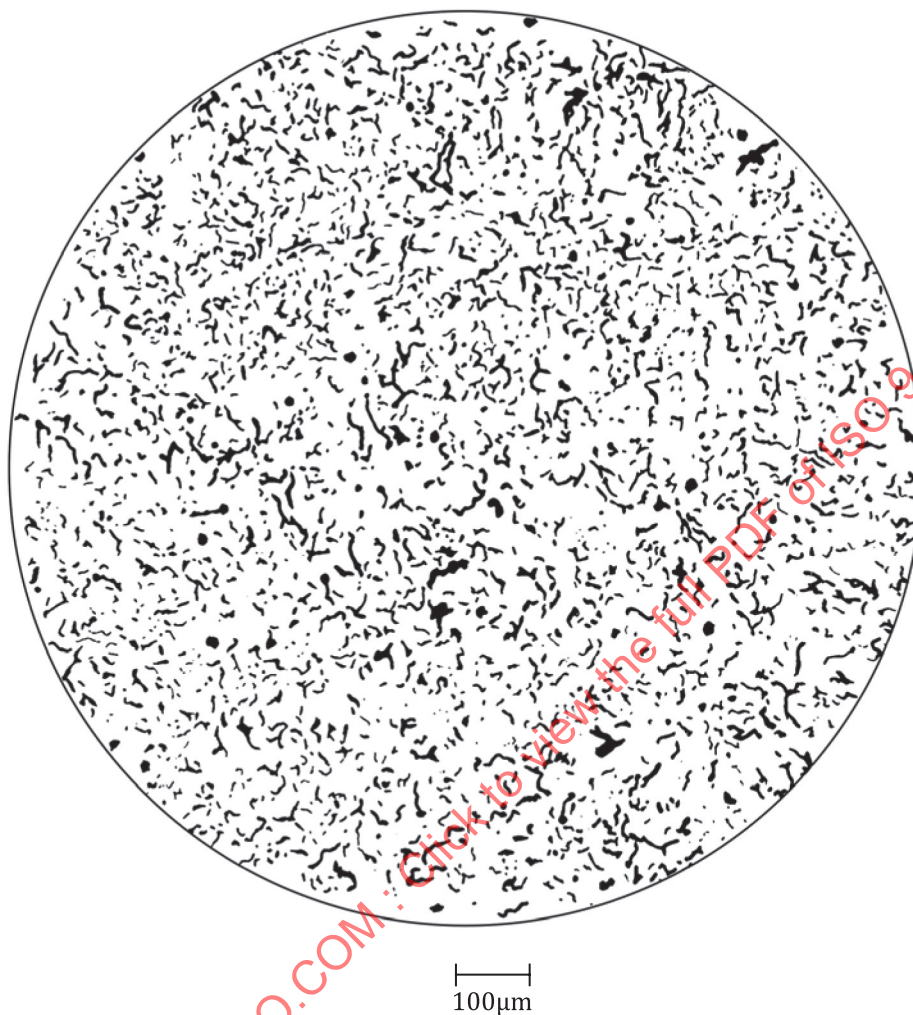
c) Reference image for graphite size 5: 0,06 mm to < 0,12 mm (form III)

Magnification $\times 100$



d) Reference image for graphite size 6: 0,03 mm to < 0,06 mm (form III)

Magnification $\times 100$



e) Reference image for graphite size 7: 0,015 mm to < 0,03 mm (form III)

Figure 5 — Reference images for graphite sizes for form III

4.5 Visual classification of graphite

The reference images given in [Figures 1, 2, 3, 4](#) and [5](#) provide a basis for classifying graphite forms, distribution and size. The characteristic features of the graphite which occur are designated by letters and numbers. For this purpose, microstructures of graphite are arranged in a series of reference images consisting of schematic microstructures of cast irons. The form, distribution and size of the graphite observed are determined by comparison with the reference images. The classification is allocated as the same as that of the images that resemble them most closely at the same magnification.

NOTE The comparison of actual microstructures with schematic images or photomicrographs depends on the subjective impression of the metallographer.

5 Sampling and sample preparation

5.1 Samples taken from a casting

When taking samples from a casting, it is essential that attention be paid to the location, to the wall thickness, to the distance from the surface and to the presence of chills. The location of the sample in the casting shall be recorded in a report.

If more than one casting is examined, the samples shall be taken from the same location in each casting for the purpose of comparability.

The location of the metallographic specimen shall be agreed between the manufacturer and the purchaser.

5.2 Sample preparation

The area of the polished surface to be examined shall be sufficient to give a true representation of the graphite structure. Attention shall be paid to the careful grinding and polishing of the samples, so that the graphite particles appear in their original form, size and distribution. Inappropriate grinding and polishing can cause an unacceptable alteration of the microstructure. If necessary, the method of polishing may be agreed between the manufacturer and the purchaser.

The examination of the graphite under the microscope is usually carried out on the unetched polished section.

6 Procedure for graphite classification

6.1 Procedure for visual classification of graphite

The polished samples shall be scanned under a microscope in such a manner that a representative area is examined. To examine the graphite form and distribution, a $\times 100$ magnification should preferably be chosen. If necessary, the magnification may be adapted in relation with the wall thickness so that the form and distribution of graphite can be determined by using the reference images given in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#) (see also [Annexes A, B and C](#)). Adjust the microscope magnification to match as closely as possible the corresponding images in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#) before classifying the graphite form and its distribution, if appropriate. The graphite size is determined by reference to [Figures 3, 4](#) and [5](#) and [Table 1](#), preferably at $\times 100$ magnification. Other magnifications are permitted (see [Table 1](#), Notes 1 and 2, as well as [7.4](#)).

Examination under the microscope is carried out by direct observation in the microscope or by projection on the ground glass of the microscope or on a visual display screen. The area of view should preferably have approximately the same size as the reference images (about 120 mm diameter). The measurement of the graphite particles can be facilitated by the use of suitably calibrated eye-pieces.

Form and distribution of graphite shall be determined by using the reference images, given in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#) (see also [Annexes A, B](#) and [C](#)). Adjust the microscope magnification to match as closely as possible the corresponding images in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#) before classifying the graphite form and its distribution, if appropriate.

If the microstructure is visualized on a visual display screen, the combined magnification of both microscope and screen (depending on its size) shall be taken into account.

6.2 Evaluation of the analysis results

The evaluation of the analysis results shall be carried out by an operator trained in this metallographic technique.

7 Reference images

7.1 General

A series of reference images (see [Figures 1](#) to [5](#)) showing schematic microstructures and photomicrographs is provided for the classification of the form, distribution and size of the graphite in cast irons.

In addition to reference images, the photomicrographs show actual graphite microstructures (see [Annexes A](#) and [B](#)).

7.2 Reference images for graphite form

The reference images for the graphite form (see [Figure 1](#)) show six characteristic forms which are designated by the Roman numbers I to VI (see also [Annex A](#)). These represent the principal types of graphite observed in cast iron materials. [Annex C](#) gives the common terminology and the occurrence of these types of graphite.

The graphite forms are specified in the relevant material standards. Percentages of these graphite forms may also be specified by these standards, e.g. in the case of compacted (vermicular) graphite cast irons.

NOTE ASTM A247 defines seven graphite types designated in the reverse order compared to the six forms defined in this document.

7.3 Reference images for the distribution of graphite (form I)

The reference images for the graphite distribution (see [Figure 2](#)) show characteristic graphite distributions designated by the letters A to E.

In addition to reference images, the photomicrographs show actual graphite microstructures (see [Annex B](#)).

A variant of distribution C, designated C', is included in [Annex B](#). This distribution corresponds to thin-walled castings.

7.4 Reference images for graphite size

[Figures 3, 4](#) and [5](#) shall be used in conjunction with [Table 1](#) to evaluate the graphite size. For $\times 100$ magnification, sizes are indicated ranging from a maximum size of the particle of $> 100 \mu\text{m}$ (size 1) down to $< 1,5 \mu\text{m}$ (size 8). When using [Table 1](#), alternative magnifications may be used (see [Table 1](#), Notes 1 and 2).

NOTE 1 Sizes 1 and 2 have no practical application for graphite forms III to VI. Therefore, they have not been included in [Figures 4](#) and [5](#).

NOTE 2 The reference images given in [Figure 3](#), [4](#), and [5](#) do not represent all the graphite particle sizes present in each of the graphite particle size ranges given in [Table 1](#).

NOTE 3 The schematics show some graphite particles smaller than the minimum size graphite particles for each size range. The schematics represent what can be seen when viewing a two dimensional sectioned view of a three dimensional structure where a normal sized particle is sectioned not through its centreline appears smaller than its actual size.

8 Designation of graphite by form, distribution and size

8.1 Designation system

To characterize the graphite observed, indications are generally necessary on the form, distribution and size of the graphite particles. For this purpose, the following symbols shall be used at different positions of the designation:

- the Roman numbers given in [Figure 1](#) are used for the graphite form at position 1;
- for form I, the capital letters given in [Figure 2](#) are used for the distribution at position 2;
- the Arabic numbers given in [Figures 3](#), [4](#), and [5](#) and [Table 1](#) are used for the graphite size at position 3.

EXAMPLE 1 For a grey cast iron with flake (lamellar) shaped graphite particles of form I, distribution A, and size 4, the following designation is used to describe that structure:

I A 4

EXAMPLE 2 For a cast iron with spheroidal graphite particles of form VI and size 4, the following designation is used to describe that structure:

VI 4

Table 1 — Dimensions of graphite particle forms I to VI

Dimensions in millimetres

Size range reference number	Indication of the particle size observed at $\times 100$ magnification	Actual dimension
1	≥ 100	≥ 1
2	50 to < 100	0,5 to < 1
3	25 to < 50	0,25 to $< 0,5$
4	12 to < 25	0,12 to $< 0,25$
5	6 to < 12	0,06 to $< 0,12$
6	3 to < 6	0,03 to $< 0,06$
7	1,5 to < 3	0,015 to $< 0,03$
8	$< 1,5$	$< 0,015$

NOTE 1 When determining size ranges 1 and 2, a lower magnification ($\times 25$ or $\times 50$) may be used.

NOTE 2 When determining size ranges 6 to 8, a higher magnification ($\times 200$ or $\times 500$) may be used.

NOTE 3 For determining size ranges, the largest visible graphite particle size is used.

8.2 Designation of different graphite sizes within a casting

If the graphite observed in different areas of view covers two sizes, reference to both is possible.

EXAMPLE 1 3/4

In addition, the predominant size may be emphasized by underlining.

EXAMPLE 2 3/4

8.3 Designation of mixed graphite forms, distributions and sizes

More complex microstructures containing different types of graphite can be defined by estimating the percentage proportions of the different types of graphite.

EXAMPLE 1 For a cast iron with a graphite area comprising 60 % flake (lamellar) shaped graphite particles of form I, distribution A and size 4 and 40 % flake (lamellar) shaped graphite particles of form I, distribution D and size 7, the following designation is used to describe the structure:

60 % I A 4 + 40 % I D 7

EXAMPLE 2 For a cast iron with a graphite area comprising 85 % spheroidal graphite particles of form VI and size 4 and 15 % vermicular graphite particles of form III and covering sizes 3 and 4, the following designation is used to describe the structure:

85 % VI 4 + 15 % III 3/4

8.4 Designation of unclassified graphite forms

If graphite particles are not identifiable to the graphite forms in this document, these should be reported as unclassified graphite forms in accordance with this document.

8.5 Nodule count

The graphite nodule count n_F is determined by using the planimetric method, as shown by [Formula \(1\)](#) (see ISO 643). Nodules are particles normally classified as form VI or V (or even form IV).

$$n_F = \frac{N}{A} \times F^2 \quad (1)$$

where

n_F is the number of particles per unit surface area of the sample;

N is the number of nodules counted;

A is the magnified area;

F is the linear magnification factor.

EXAMPLE At a magnification of $\times 100$, a circle measuring 79,8 mm in diameter ($= 5\,000\text{ mm}^2$) is superimposed over a micrograph. At the preferred magnification of $\times 100$, the circular area should preferably contain at least 50 graphite particles in order to minimize the counting error associated with a circular test pattern. Two counts are made:

n_1 is the number of graphite particles completely within the test circle;

n_2 is the number of graphite particles intersected by the test circle.