

ANSI/IES **LS-6-20**



**LIGHTING SCIENCE:  
CALCULATION OF LIGHT  
AND ITS EFFECTS**  
AN AMERICAN NATIONAL STANDARD



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Publication of this document  
has been approved by IES.  
Suggestions for revisions  
should be directed to IES.

**Prepared for IES  
By the Computer Committee**



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# CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction and Scope</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1	Introduction .....	1
1.2	Purpose and Scope .....	1
<b>2.0</b>	<b>The Role and Use of Lighting Calculations</b> .....	<b>1</b>
2.1	Analysis of Proposed Lighting Systems .....	2
2.2	Demonstration of Code Compliance .....	2
2.3	Assessment of Some Aspect of Design Quality .....	2
2.4	Design of Lighting Equipment .....	2
2.5	Education .....	2
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Calculating Illuminance, Luminance, and Flux</b> .....	<b>3</b>
3.1	Illuminance from Point Sources .....	3
3.2	Illuminance from Area Sources .....	4
3.3	Luminance at a Point .....	4
3.4	Flux on an Area .....	5
3.5	Approximations .....	5
3.6	Diffuse Surfaces .....	6
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Photometric Data for Calculations</b> .....	<b>8</b>
4.1	Luminaire Photometry for Calculations .....	8
4.2	Far-Field Luminaire Photometry .....	8
4.3	Near-Field Luminaire Photometry .....	9
4.4	Properties of Surfaces and Materials .....	9
	4.4.1 Reflection .....	9
	4.4.2 Transmittance .....	10
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Model of Light Transport</b> .....	<b>10</b>
5.1	Direct Component Calculations .....	11
5.2	Interreflected Component Calculations .....	11
	5.2.1 Radiative Transfer .....	11
	5.2.2 Ray Tracing .....	13

<b>6.0</b>	<b>Renderings Based on Calculations</b>	<b>15</b>
6.1	Overview of Rendering Generation	15
6.2	Computational Basis	16
6.2.1	Photometric Calculations	16
6.2.2	Radiometric Calculations	16
6.2.3	Radiative Transfer Calculations	16
6.2.4	Ray Tracing Calculations	17
6.2.5	Mixed Calculations	17
6.3	Adding Realism to Renderings	17
6.4	Display Properties and Limitations	18
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Evaluating Lighting Analysis Software</b>	<b>21</b>
7.1	Analytic Tests	21
7.2	Measurement Tests	22
7.3	Testing Software	22
<b>8.0</b>	<b>Factors Affecting Lighting Calculations: Light Loss Factors</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>9.0</b>	<b>Assessing Computed Results</b>	<b>23</b>
9.1	Averages	23
9.2	Minimum and Maximum	23
9.3	Coefficient of Variation	23
9.4	Criterion Ratings	23
<b>10.0</b>	<b>Standardized Calculation Procedures</b>	<b>24</b>
10.1	Calculating Average Illuminance	24
10.1.1	Determining the CU: The Zonal Cavity Method	25
10.1.2	Effective Cavity Reflectances	26
10.1.3	Limitations	26
10.2	Calculating Glare	26
10.2.1	Visual Comfort Probability	26
10.2.2	Unified Glare Rating	27
<b>Annex A – Formulary</b>		<b>27</b>
A.1	Calculating Configuration Factors	29
A.2	Calculating Form Factors	31
A.3	Calculating Lumen Method Coefficients of Utilization	32
A.4	Calculating Luminaire Spacing Criteria	34
A.5	Calculating Solid Angle	36
A.6	Calculating Luminaire Efficiency	37
A.7	Calculating Average Luminaire Luminance	37
A.8	Calculating Visual Comfort Probability (VCP)	38

<b>Annex B – Examples of Application of Radiative Transfer .....</b>	<b>40</b>
B.1 Implementation of the Flux Balance Model.....	40
B.2 Monte Carlo Ray Tracing.....	42
<b>Annex C – Comparison of Calculated and Measured Quantities .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>45</b>

*The purpose of computing is insight, not numbers. 1961*  
*The purpose of computing numbers is not yet in sight. 1997*  
— W. Hamming

## 1.0 Introduction and Scope

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### 1.1 Introduction

Predicting the performance of a proposed lighting design is an integral part of the design process, allowing the designer to examine and compare alternatives, refine a promising idea, see whether applicable recommendations and codes will be met, evaluate energy conservation and lighting control opportunities, invoke standardized procedures to predict glare and visibility, and perhaps generate a rendering of how a space might appear. The ability to predict performance requires a computational infrastructure that consists of: standardized data that characterize lighting equipment; a knowledge of the properties of surface and other components of the environment involved; theoretical models of how light behaves; software that makes use of those models; and computer hardware on which the software operates. However elaborate this infrastructure, its output still requires careful interpretation.

### 1.2 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this Lighting Science document is to provide the theoretical basis for lighting calculations, to describe how this theory is approximated and used, and to describe how it is embodied in most lighting analysis software. This can provide, from a user's perspective, an understanding of the power and limitations of calculations—however performed—and thus make clear their use in the lighting design process.

These purposes require the presentation of information in the following three general areas.

- The fundamental theories of light transport and interaction with architecture, what form—exact or approximate—the mathematical models of these theories take, and how the models are in turn used in lighting software.
- The geometric, photometric, and physical information that is commonly available as input into a lighting calculation process and how the nature, limits, and uncertainties of this information affect the results.
- The various ways of predicting lighting system performance by assessing and interpreting calculation results and their comparison with anticipated or actual measured results.

In addition, this document explains IES standard calculation procedures, including lumen method coefficients of utilization and glare assessment.

## 2.0 The Role and Use of Lighting Calculations

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Like most technical disciplines in engineering and design, lighting had a long history of support and direction provided by hand calculation, nomograms, and mechanical calculators.<sup>1</sup> By the middle of the 20th century these were, to some extent, augmented with large analog and then digital electronic computers. But the eventual widespread availability and use of inexpensive computers running standardized operating systems has made general purpose lighting analysis software (hereafter simply “software”) a commercially viable enterprise, and hand calculations, however augmented, now have virtually no role in modern illuminating engineering or lighting design.