

4.2.2 Description File Specification

The [Description](#) holds [descriptions](#) that describe [SNOMED CT concepts](#). A [description](#) is used to give meaning to a [concept](#) and provide well-understood and standard ways of referring to a [concept](#).

Table 4.2.2-1: Description file - Detailed Specification

Field	Data type	Purpose	Mandatory	Part of Primary Key
id	String	Uniquely identifies the description .	NO	YES (Full /Snapshot)
effectiveTime	Time	Specifies the inclusive date at which the component version's state became the then current valid state of the component Note: In distribution files the effectiveTime should follow the short ISO date format (YYYYMMDD) and should not include the hours, minutes, seconds or timezone indicator.	YES	YES (Full) Optional (Snapshot)
active	Boolean	Specifies whether the state of the description was active or inactive from the nominal release date specified by the effectiveTime .	YES	NO
moduleId	String	Identifies the description version's module. Set to a child of 900000000000443000 Module within the metadata hierarchy .	YES	NO
conceptId	String	Identifies the concept to which this description applies. Set to the identifier of a concept in the 138875005 SNOMED CT Concept hierarchy within the Concept . Note that a specific version of a description is not directly bound to a specific version of the concept to which it applies. Which version of a description applies to a concept depends on its effectiveTime and the point in time at which it is accessed.	NO	NO
languageCode	String	Specifies the language of the description text using the two character ISO-639-1 code. Note that this specifies a language level only, not a dialect or country code.	NO	NO
typeId	String	Identifies whether the description is fully specified name a synonym or other description type. This field is set to a child of 900000000000446008 Description type in the Metadata hierarchy .	NO	NO
term	String	The description version's text value, represented in UTF-8 encoding.	YES	NO
caseSignificanceId	String	Identifies the concept enumeration value that represents the case significance of this description version. For example, the term may be completely case sensitive, case insensitive or initial letter case insensitive. This field will be set to a child of 900000000000447004 Case significance within the metadata hierarchy .	YES	NO

Only one [description](#) record with the same id field will be current at any point in time. The current record will be the one with the most recent [effectiveTime](#) before or equal to the point in time under consideration.

If the [active](#) field of this record is false ('0'), then the [description](#) is [inactive](#) at that point in time. If the [active](#) field is true ('1'), then the [description](#) is associated with the [concept](#) identified by the conceptId field.

The conceptId field, the languageCode field and the typeId field will not change between two rows with the same id, in other words they are immutable. Where a change is required to one of these fields, then the component will be inactivated (by appending a row with the same id and the [active](#) field set to false) and another row will be added representing a new component with a new id. Only limited changes may be made to the [term](#) field, as defined by editorial rules.

Each [concept](#) will have at least one [active description](#) with a typeId of 90000000000013009 | [synonym](#) and at least one [active description](#) with a typeId of 9000000000003001 | [Fully specified name](#).

Where a [concept](#) only has one [active description](#) with a typeId of 9000000000003001 | [Fully specified name](#) across all [language](#) codes within a release, then that [Description](#) can be taken as the [Fully Specified Name](#) for all [languages](#) and [dialects](#), and need not be explicitly included in every [language reference set](#) associated with that release.

The [term](#) field will be restricted as follows:

- to an overall maximum length of 32Kb;
- to a maximum length, configurable for each [description type](#) as defined in the [900000000000538005 | Description format reference set](#) member associated with that [description type](#)- see the [Description Format Reference Set](#) specifications document for more details.
- The [900000000000538005 | Description format reference set](#) also defined the format of the [term](#) field (plain text, limited HTML, XHTML) for each [description type](#).
- Control characters (including TABs, CRs and LFs) will not appear in [900000000000540000 | Plain text](#) or [900000000000541001 | Limited HTML](#) format types.

Related Links

- [3.1.2. Descriptions and Terms](#)
- [5.2.4.3 Description Format Reference Set](#)
- [Appendix C. Unicode UTF-8 encoding](#)
- [Description](#)