

India's Draft Patent Manual, Version 4.0: What It Means

On August 19, 2026, India's Patent Office released the Draft Manual of Patent Office Practice and Procedure, Version 4.0. A 204-page update. It replaces the 2019 (Version 3.0) manual. The draft was issued for stakeholder comments for 30 days.

India's patent system has undergone significant development since the Patents Act, 1970 was amended to introduce product patent protection in areas such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals, food and agro-chemicals and to align the framework with TRIPS obligations. The Patents Rules, 2003 have also been amended repeatedly. India joined the PCT in 1998 and the Indian Patent Office has operated as an ISA/IPEA since 2013, contributing to the substantial growth in international and national-phase filings.

The Patent Office has also progressively digitized its operations through e-filing, electronic processing and automated workflows. Version 4.0 is intended to bring the practical guidance in line with these legal and technological developments. It is a reference document for patent applicants and practitioners and, importantly, does not itself have the force of law.

It is a practical guide to how the Patent Office operates.

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A few things converged to make this rewrite necessary. The 2024 amendments to the Patents Rules needed to be reflected somewhere practitioners could actually use. The office has also been steadily re-engineering its internal procedures, largely through automation. Electronic processing has changed how files move through the system, to the point that the old manual no longer matched reality. And years of court rulings and stakeholder feedback had accumulated since the 2019 version.

Key changes:

Digital execution: The clearest theme running through the draft is a push toward e-filing and paperless workflows. The documents can now be executed with a digital signature or an Aadhaar-based e-sign, and once that is done, no physical signature is needed on top of it. The draft also shuts the door on a workaround some applicants used — pasting a scanned signature onto a form doesn't count. That is a small detail, but it will matter to foreign applicants and anyone juggling multiple co-applicants across time zones.

Consolidated guidance: Rather than leaving practitioners to piece together guidance from scattered circulars, the manual pulls the entire prosecution journey into a single reference — filing and jurisdiction, required documents, sequence listings, publication, provisional versus complete specifications, divisionals, convention applications, PCT national phase entry, examination, expedited examination, and both pre- and post-grant opposition. For anyone managing a large filing portfolio, that consolidation alone could cut down on avoidable procedural errors.

Sequence listings: Applications disclosing nucleotide or amino acid sequences now need the listing submitted in computer-readable text; no print copies; and the draft points applicants to WIPO's ST.25 and ST.26 standards depending on the situation.

That is squarely aimed at biotech, pharma, and life-sciences filers, where getting this wrong can cause real headaches.

Expedite Examination: The draft lays out exactly how an ordinary examination request can be converted into an expedited one — the fee, the paperwork, and the timelines the office commits to for examiner reports and the first statement of objections. As expedited examination becomes a more common strategic move, having the mechanics written down clearly is genuinely useful.

Conclusion

Version 4.0 is a significant practical update to India's patent prosecution framework, bringing the Patent Office's guidance more closely in line with recent rule changes, digital filing practices and developments in patent procedure. For applicants and practitioners, its value lies less in creating new substantive law and more in providing greater clarity on how existing requirements are expected to operate in practice.

For UAE- and GCC-based applicants in particular, the clarification around digital execution and e-filing should help simplify cross-border prosecution and reduce reliance on physical paperwork. At the same time, applicants should continue to treat proof-of-right, assignments and other entitlement documents as distinct from signature formalities. Until the draft is finalized, Version 4.0 should be regarded as an important indication of the Patent Office's intended practice rather than as a definitive statement of law or settled procedure.