E, Z

The approved stereodescriptors of stereoisomeric alkenes $R^1R^2C=CR^3R^4$ ( $R^1 \neq R^2$, $R^3 \neq R^4$); neither $R^1$ nor $R^2$ need be different from $R^3$ or $R^4$), cumulenes $R^1R^2C(=C=C)_n=CR^3R^4$ and related systems e.g. $R^1R^2C=NOH$, HON=CH{[CH$_2$]$_n$}$_2$C=NOH. The group of highest CIP priority attached to one of the terminal doubly bonded atoms of the alkene, oxime, etc. or cumulene (i.e. $R^1$ or $R^2$) is compared with the group of highest precedence attached to the other (i.e. $R^3$ or $R^4$). The stereoisomer is designated as Z (zusammen = together) if the groups lie on the same side of a reference plane passing through the double bond and perpendicular to the plane containing the bonds linking the groups to the double-bonded atoms; the other stereoisomer is designated as E (entgegen = opposite). The descriptors may be applied to structures with a fractional bond order between one and two; and to double bonds involving elements other than carbon. They are not used to describe ring substitution relationships.

See also: cis-trans isomers

Source:
PAC, 1996, 68, 2193 (Basic terminology of stereochemistry (IUPAC Recommendations 1996)) on page 2206