Abstract

This document describes the fundamental and unique style conventions and editorial policies currently in use for the RFC Series. It captures the RFC Editor’s basic requirements and offers guidance regarding the style and structure of an RFC. Additional guidance is captured on a website that reflects the experimental nature of that guidance and prepares it for future inclusion in the RFC Style guide.

Guidance provided by this document will not be applied until published as an RFC. Please send your comments about the contents of this document to <rfc-interest@rfc-editor.org>.

Status of this Memo

This Internet-Draft is submitted to IETF in full conformance with the provisions of BCP 78 and BCP 79.

Internet-Drafts are working documents of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), its areas, and its working groups. Note that other groups may also distribute working documents as Internet-Drafts.

Internet-Drafts are draft documents valid for a maximum of six months and may be updated, replaced, or obsoleted by other documents at any time. It is inappropriate to use Internet-Drafts as reference material or to cite them other than as "work in progress."

The list of current Internet-Drafts can be accessed at http://www.ietf.org/1d-abstracts.html

The list of Internet-Draft Shadow Directories can be accessed at http://www.ietf.org/shadow.html

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1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of the RFC publication process is to produce documents that are readable, clear, consistent, and reasonably uniform. The basic format conventions for RFCs were established in the 1970s by the original RFC Editor, Jon Postel. This document describes the fundamental and unique style conventions and editorial policies currently in use for the RFC Series [RFC4844]. It is intended as a stable, infrequently updated reference for authors, editors, and reviewers.

The RFC Editor also maintains a web portion of the Style Guide (see Appendix A) that describes issues as they are raised and indicates how the RFC Editor intends to address them. As new style issues arise, the RFC Editor will first address them on the web portion of the Style Guide [StyleWeb]. These may become part of the RFC Style Guide when it is revised.

The world of technical publishing has generally accepted rules for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, sentence length and complexity, parallelism, etc. The RFC Editor generally follows these accepted rules as defined by the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) [CMOS], with a few important exceptions to avoid ambiguity in complex technical prose and to handle mixtures of text and computer languages. This document presents these exceptions as applied or recommended by the RFC Editor.

All RFCs begin as Internet-Drafts, and a well-written and properly constructed Internet-Draft [ID-GUIDE] provides a strong basis for a good RFC. The RFC Editor accepts Internet-Drafts from specified streams for publication [RFC4844] and applies the rules and guidelines for the RFC Series during the editorial process.

2. RFC Editorial Philosophy

Authors may find it helpful to understand the RFC Editor’s goals during the publication process, namely:

- Prepare the document according to RFC style and format.
- Make the document as clear, consistent, and readable as possible.
- Correct larger content/clarity issues; flag any unclear passages for author review.
- Fix inconsistencies (e.g., terms that appear in various forms, text that appears multiple times, or inconsistent capitalization).
We strive for consistency within:

a. the document,

b. a cluster of documents [CLUSTER], and

c. the series of RFCs on the subject matter.

The editorial process of the RFC Editor is not an additional technical review of the document. Where the RFC Editor may suggest changes in wording for clarity and readability, it is up to the author, working group, or stream approving body to determine whether the changes have an impact on the technical meaning of the document [RFC4844]. If the original wording is a more accurate representation of the technical content being described in the document, it takes precedence over editorial conventions.

The activity of editing often creates a tension between author and editor. The RFC Editor attempts to minimize this conflict for RFC publication, while continually striving to produce a uniformly excellent document series. The RFC Editor refers to this fundamental tension as "editorial balance", and maintaining this balance is a continuing concern for the RFC Editor. There is a prime directive that must rule over grammatical conventions: do not change the intended meaning of the text.

If a document is submitted to the RFC Editor that proves to be uneditable due to consistently unclear and poorly written text, the document may be returned to the stream for revision. See more details in Appendix A.2.

3. RFC Style Conventions

This Style guide does not use RFC 2119 terminology. Terms such as lowercase "must" and "should" refer to guidance that the RFC Editor will either apply automatically ("must") or query the authors if the authors have not followed that guidance ("should").

3.1. Language

The RFC publication language is English. This may be either American or British as long as an individual document is internally consistent. Where both American and British English are used within a document or cluster of documents, the text will be modified to be consistent with American English.

3.2. Punctuation
* No overstriking (or underlining) is allowed.

* When a sentence ended by a period is immediately followed by another sentence, there must be two blank spaces after the period.

* A comma is used before the last item of a series, e.g.,

  "TCP service is reliable, ordered, and full-duplex"

* When quoting literal text, punctuation is placed outside quotation marks, e.g.,

  'Search for the string "Error Found"'.

When quoting general text, such as general text from another RFC, punctuation may be included within the quotation marks, e.g.,

  RFC 4844 indicates that "RFCs are available free of charge to anyone via the Internet."

Quotes are not necessary when block quotes are used.

3.3. DNS Names and URIs

DNS names, whether or not in URIs, that are used as generic examples in RFCs should use the particular examples defined in "Reserved Top-Level DNS Names" [RFC2606], to avoid accidental conflicts.

Angle brackets are strongly recommended around URIs [STD66], e.g.,

<http://example.com/>

3.4. Capitalization

* Capitalization must be consistent within the document and ideally should be consistent with related RFCs. Refer to the online "Table of decisions on consistent usage of terms in RFCs" [PUB-PROCESS].

* Per CMOS guidelines, the major words in RFC titles and section titles should be capitalized (this is sometimes called "title case"). Typically, all words in a title will be capitalized, except for internal articles, prepositions, and conjunctions.
* Section titles that are in sentence form will follow typical sentence capitalization.

* Titles of figures may be in sentence form or use title case.

### 3.5. Citations

* References and citations must match. That is, there must be a reference for each citation used, and vice versa.

* Citations must be enclosed in square brackets, e.g., "[CITE1]".

* A citation/reference tag must not contain spaces or hyphens.

  Example: "[RFC2119]", not "[RFC 2119]".

  However, the proper textual naming of an RFC contains a space.

  Example: "See RFC 2119 [BCP14] for more information."

* Cross-references within the body of the text and to other RFCs must use section numbers rather than page numbers, as pagination may change per format and device.

### 3.6. Abbreviation Rules

Abbreviations should be expanded in document titles and upon first use in the document. The full expansion of the text should be followed by the abbreviation itself in parentheses. The exception is abbreviations that are so common that the readership of RFCs can be expected to recognize them immediately; examples include (but are not limited to) TCP, IP, SNMP, and HTTP. The online list of abbreviations [ABBR] provides guidance. Some cases are marginal, and the RFC Editor will make the final judgment, weighing obscurity against complexity.

Note: The online list of abbreviations is not exhaustive or definitive. It is a list of abbreviations appearing in RFCs and sometimes reflects discussions with authors, Work Group (WG) chairs, and/or Area Directors (ADs). Note that some abbreviations have multiple expansions. Additionally, this list includes some terms that look like abbreviations but are actually fixed names for things, and hence cannot and should not be expanded. These are noted as "No expansion".

### 4. Structure of an RFC

A published RFC will contain the elements in the following list.
Some of these sections are required, as noted. Those sections marked with "*" will be supplied by the RFC Editor during the editorial process when necessary. Sections are allowed to contain nothing but subsections. The rules for each of these elements are described in more detail below.
Within the body of the memo, the order shown above is strongly recommended. Exceptions will be questioned. Outside the body of the memo, the order above is required. The section numbers above are for illustrative purposes; they are not intended to correspond to required numbering in an RFC.

The elements preceding the body of the memo should not be numbered. Typically, the body of the memo will have numbered sections and the appendices will be labeled with letters. Any sections that appear after the appendices should not be numbered or labeled (e.g., see "Contributors" above).

4.1. First-Page Header

Headers will follow the format as described in "RFC Streams, Headers, and Boilerplates" [RFC5741] and its successors. In addition, the following conventions will apply.

4.1.1. Author/Editor

The determination of who should be listed as an author or editor on an RFC is made by the stream.
The author’s name (initials followed by family name) appears on the first line of the heading. Some variation, such as additional initials or capitalization of family name, is acceptable but the author should be consistent once they’ve selected a name format.

The total number of authors or editors on the first page is generally limited to five individuals and their affiliations. If there is a request for more than five authors, the stream approving body needs to consider if one or two editors should have primary responsibility for this document, with the other individuals listed in the Contributors or Acknowledgements sections. There must be a direct correlation of authors and editors in the header and Author’s Address section. These are the individuals that must sign off on the document during the AUTH48 process and respond to inquiries, such as errata.

4.1.2. Organization

The author’s organization is indicated on the line following the author’s name.

For multiple authors, each author name appears on its own line, followed by that author’s organization. When more than one author is affiliated with the same organization, the organization can be "factored out", appearing only once following the corresponding Author lines. However, such factoring is inappropriate when it would force an unacceptable reordering of author names.

If an author cannot or will not provide an affiliation for any reason, "Independent", "Individual Contributor", "Retired", or some other term that appropriately describes the author’s affiliation may be used. Alternatively, a blank line may be included in the document header when no affiliation is provided.

4.1.3. "ISSN: 2070-1721"

The RFC Series has been assigned an International Standard Serial Number of 2070-1721 [ISO3297]. It will be included by the RFC Editor.

4.1.4. Updates and Obsoletes

When an RFC obsoletes or updates a previously published RFC or RFCs, this information is in the header. For example:

"Updates: nnnn" or "Updates: nnnn, ..., nnnn"

"Obsoletes: nnnn" or "Obsoletes: nnnn, ..., nnnn"
If the document updates or obsoletes more than one document, numbers will be listed in ascending order.

4.2. Full Title

The title must be centered below the rest of the heading, preceded by two blank lines and followed by one blank line.

Choosing a good title for an RFC can be a challenge. A good title should fairly represent the scope and purpose of the document without being either too general or too specific and lengthy.

Abbreviations or acronyms in a title must generally be expanded when first encountered (see Section 3.5 for additional guidance on acronyms).

It is often helpful to follow the expansion with the parenthesized abbreviation, as in the following example:

Encoding Rules for the
Common Routing Encapsulation Extension Protocol (CREEP)

The RFC Editor recommends that documents a particular company’s private protocol should bear a title of the form "Foo’s ... Protocol" (where Foo is a company name), to clearly differentiate it from a protocol of more general applicability.

4.3. Abstract Section

Every RFC must have an Abstract that provides a concise and comprehensive overview of the purpose and contents of the entire document, to give a technically knowledgeable reader a general overview of the function of the document.

Composing a useful Abstract generally requires thought and care. Usually an Abstract should begin with a phrase like "This memo ..." or "This document ...". A satisfactory Abstract can often be constructed in part from material within the Introduction section, but an effective Abstract may be shorter, less detailed, and perhaps broader in scope than the Introduction. Simply copying and pasting the first few paragraphs of the Introduction is allowed, but it may result in an Abstract that is both incomplete and redundant. Note also that an Abstract is not a substitute for an Introduction; the RFC should be self-contained as if there were no Abstract.

Similarly, the Abstract should be complete in itself. It will appear in isolation in publication announcements and in the online index of RFCs. Therefore, the Abstract must not contain citations.
4.4. RFC Editor or Stream Notes Section

At times, the stream approving body may approve inclusion of an editorial note to explain anything unusual about the process that led to the document's publication or to note a correction. In this case, a Stream Note section will contain such a note.

Additionally, an RFC Editor Note section may contain a note inserted by the RFC Editor to highlight special circumstances surrounding an RFC.

4.5. Status of This Memo Section

The RFC Editor will supply an appropriate "Status of This Memo" as defined in RFC 5741 [RFC5741].

4.6. Copyright, Licenses, and IPR Boilerplate Section

The full copyright and license notices are available on the IETF Trust Legal Provisions Documents website [IETF-TRUST].

4.7. Table of Contents Section

A Table of Contents (TOC) is required in all RFCs. It must be positioned after the Copyright notice and before the Introduction.

4.8. Body of the Memo Section

Following the TOC is the body of the memo.

Each RFC must include an "Introduction" section that (among other things) explains the motivation for the RFC and (if appropriate) describes the applicability of the document, e.g., whether it specifies a protocol, provides a discussion of some problem, is simply of interest to the Internet community, or provides a status report on some activity. The body of the memo and the Abstract must be self-contained and separable. This may result in some duplication of text between the Abstract and the Introduction; this is acceptable.

4.8.1. Introduction Section

The Introduction section should always be the first section following the TOC (except in the case of MIB module documents). While "Introduction" is recommended, authors may choose alternate titles such as "Overview" or "Background". These alternates are acceptable.

For MIB module documents, common practice has been for "The Internet-

4.8.2. Requirement Words Section

Some documents use certain capitalized words ("MUST", "SHOULD", etc.) to specify precise requirement levels for technical features. RFC 2119 [BCP14] defines a default interpretation of these capitalized words in IETF documents. If this interpretation is used, RFC 2119 must be cited (as specified in RFC 2119) and included as a normative reference. Otherwise, the correct interpretation must be specified in the document.

This section must appear as part of the body of the text (as defined by this document). It must appear as part of, or subsequent to, the Introduction section.

These words are considered part of the technical content of the document and are intended to provide guidance to implementers about specific technical features, generally governed by considerations of interoperability. RFC 2119 says:

Imperatives of the type defined in this memo must be used with care and sparingly. In particular, they must only be used where it is actually required for interoperability or to limit behavior which has potential for causing harm (e.g., limiting retransmissions). For example, they must not be used to try to impose a particular method on implementers where the method is not required for interoperability.

4.8.3. IANA Considerations Section

See "Guidelines for Writing an IANA Considerations Section in RFCs" [BCP26].

The RFC Editor will update text accordingly after the IANA assignments have been made. It is helpful for authors to clearly identify where text should be updated to reflect the newly assigned values. For example, the use of "TBD1", "TBD2", etc., is recommended in the IANA Considerations section and in the body of the document.

If the authors have provided values to be assigned by IANA, the RFC Editor will verify that the values inserted by the authors match those that have actually been registered on the IANA site. When writing a given value, consistent use of decimal or hexadecimal is recommended.
If any of the IANA-related information is not clear, the RFC Editor will work with IANA to send queries to the authors to ensure that assignments and values are properly inserted.

The RFC Editor will remove an IANA Considerations section that says there are no IANA considerations (although such a section is required in the Internet-Draft preceding the RFC).

4.8.4. Internationalization Considerations Section

All RFCs that deal with internationalization issues should have a section describing those issues; see "IETF Policy on Character Sets and Languages" [BCP18], Section 6, for more information.

4.8.5. Security Considerations Section

All RFCs must contain a section that discusses the security considerations relevant to the specification; see "Guidelines for Writing RFC Text on Security Considerations" [BCP72] for more information.

Note that additional boilerplate for RFCs containing MIB and YANG modules also exists. See "Security Guidelines for IETF MIB Modules" [MIB-SEC] and "yang module security considerations" [YANG-SEC] for details.

4.8.6. References Section

The reference list is solely for recording reference entries. Introductory text is not allowed.

The RFC style allows the use of any of a variety of reference styles, as long as they are used consistently within a document. However, where necessary, in specific instances, some reference styles have been described for use within the Series. See the examples in this document.

The RFC Editor ensures that references to other RFCs refer to the most current RFC available on that topic (unless provided with reason not to do so). When referring to an obsoleted document, it is common practice to also refer to the most recent version as well.

A reference to an RFC that has been assigned an STD [RFC1311], BCP [RFC1818], or FYI [FYI90] sub-series number must include the sub-series number of the document. Note that the FYI series was ended by RFC 6360. RFCs that were published with an FYI sub-series number and still maintain the FYI number must include the sub-series number in the reference.
Reference lists must indicate whether each reference is normative or informative, where normative references are essential to implementing or understanding the content of the RFC, and informative references provide additional information. When both normative and informative references exist, the references section should be split into two subsections:

s. References

s.1. Normative References

xxx

xxx

s.2. Informative References

xxx

xxx

References will generally appear in alphanumeric order by citation tag. Where there are only normative or informative references, no subsection is required; the top level section should say "Normative References" or "Informative References".

Normative references to Internet-Drafts will cause publication of the RFC to be suspended until the referenced draft is also ready for publication; the RFC Editor will then update the entry to refer to the RFC and publish both documents simultaneously.

4.8.6.1. URIs in RFCs

The use of URIs in references is acceptable as long as the URI is the most stable (i.e., unlikely to change and expected to be continuously available) and direct reference possible. The URI will be verified as valid during the RFC editorial process.

If a dated URI (one that includes a timestamp for the page) is available for a referenced web page, its use is required.

Note that URIs may not be the sole information provided for a reference entry.

4.8.6.2. Referencing RFCs

The following format is required for citing RFCs. Note the ordering for multiple authors: the last author listed is treated differently than the already listed authors.
4.8.6.3. Referencing STDs and BCPs

Standards (STDs) and Best Current Practices (BCPs) may consist of a single RFC or multiple RFCs. When an STD or BCP that contains

Example:

<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc6429>
multiple RFCs is referenced, the reference entry should include ALL of the RFCs comprising that subseries. The authors should refer to specific RFC numbers as part of the text (not as citations) and cite the subseries number. Inclusion of the URI to the STD or BCP info page is now recommended. The text should appear as follows:

See RFC 1034 [STD13].

For an STD or BCP that contains one RFC:

[STDXXX] Last name, First initial., Ed. (if applicable) "RFC Title", BCP/FYI/STD #, RFC ####, Date of Publication.
<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/std####>

Example:

<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/std72>

For an STD or BCP that contains two or more RFCs:

[STDXXX] Last name, First initial., Ed. (if applicable) "RFC Title", BCP/FYI/STD #, RFC ####, Date of Publication.

Last name, First initial., Ed. (if applicable) and First initial. Last name, Ed. (if applicable) "RFC Title", BCP/FYI/STD #, RFC ####, Date of Publication.

<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/std####>

Example:

<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/std13>

4.8.6.4. Referencing Internet-Drafts
References to Internet-Drafts can only appear as Informative references. Given that several revisions of an I-D may be produced in a short time frame, references must include the publication date (month and year), the full Internet-Draft file name (including the version number), and the use of the phrase "Work in Progress". If the I-D referenced has a version published as an RFC, references must also include the RFC. Authors may reference multiple versions of an I-D.

\[\text{[SYMBOLIC-TAG]}\] Last name, First initial. and First initial. Last name, Ed. (if applicable) "I-D Title", Work in Progress, draft-string-NN, Month Year.

Example:


4.8.6.5. Referencing Errata

The following format is required when a reference to an erratum report is necessary:

\[\text{[ErrNNNN]}\] RFC Errata, Erratum ID NNNN, RFC MMMM.

\[\text{[Err1912]}\] RFC Errata, Erratum ID 1912, RFC 2978.

4.8.6.6. Referencing Other Standards Development Organizations (SDOs)

The following format is suggested when referencing a document or standard from another SDO in which authors are listed:

\[\text{[SYMBOLIC-TAG]}\] Last name, First initial. and First initial. Last name, "Document Title", Document reference number, date of publication, <URI if available>.


Note that the list of authors is ordered as on the actual document.
and the common, abbreviated form of the SDO is used.

Alternatively, when no list of authors is available, the following format is recommended:


Example:


4.9. Appendices Section

The RFC Editor recommends placing references before the Appendices. Appendices should be labeled as "Appendix A.  Appendix A Title", "A.1.  Appendix A.1 Title", "Appendix B.  Appendix B Title", etc.

4.10. Acknowledgments Section

This optional section may be used instead of or in addition to a Contributors section. It is often used by authors to publicly thank those who have provided feedback regarding a document and to note any documents from which text was borrowed.

4.11. Contributors Section

This optional section acknowledges those who have made significant contributions to the document.

In a similar fashion to the Author section, the RFC Editor does not make the determination as to who should be listed as a contributor to an RFC. The determination of who should be listed as a contributor on an RFC is made by the stream.

The Contributors section may include brief statements about the nature of particular contributions ("Sam contributed Section 3"), and it may also include affiliations of listed contributors. At the discretion of the author(s), contact addresses may also be included in the Contributors section, for those contributors whose knowledge makes them useful future contacts for information about the RFC. Any contact information should be formatted similar to how the
information is formatted in the Author’s Address section.

4.12. "Author’s Address" or "Authors’ Addresses" Section

This required section gives contact information for the author(s) listed in the first-page header.

Contact information must include a long-lived email address and optionally may include a postal address and/or telephone number. If the postal address is included, it should include the country name using the English short name listed by the ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency [ISO3166]. The purpose of this section is to (1) unambiguously define author identity (e.g., the John Smith who works for FooBar Systems) and to (2) provide contact information for future readers who have questions or comments.

The practice of munged addresses (i.e., altering an email address to make it less readable to bots and web crawlers to avoid spam) is not appropriate in an archival document series. Author contact information is provided so that readers can easily contact the author with questions and/or comments. Address munging is not allowed in RFCs.

5. IANA Considerations

No IANA actions required.

6. Security Considerations

No security considerations.
7. References

7.1. Normative References


7.2. Informative References


<https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/>.


[MIB-BOILER] IETF OPS Area, "Boilerplate for IETF MIB Documents",


[PUB-PROCESS] RFC Editor, "Publication Process",

[RFC1311] Postel, J., "Introduction to the STD Notes", RFC 1311,

RFC 1818, August 1995,

[RFC2223] Postel, J. and J. Reynolds, "Instructions to RFC Authors",
RFC 2223, October 1997,

BCP 32, RFC 2606, June 1999,

RFC 4844, July 2007,

RFC 5741, December 2009,


Appendix A.  Related Procedures

The following procedures are related to the application and updating of the RFC Style Guide.

A.1.  Dispute Resolution

There are competing rationales for some of the rules described in this Guide, and the RFC Editor has selected the ones that work best for the Series. However, at times, an author may have a disagreement with the RFC Production Center (RPC) over the application of style guide conventions. In such cases, the authors should discuss their concerns with the RPC. If no agreement can be reached between the RPC and the authors, the RFC Series Editor will, with input from the appropriate stream approving body, make a final determination. If further resolution is required, the dispute resolution process as described in the RFC Editor Model [RFC6635] will be followed.

A.2.  Returning an I-D to the Document Stream

For a given document, if the RFC Editor determines that it cannot be edited without serious risk of altering the meaning of the technical content or if the RFC Editor does not have the resources to provide the level of editing it needs, it may be sent back to the stream approving body with a request to improve the clarity, consistency, and/or readability of the document. This is not to be considered a dispute with the author.

A.3.  Revising This Document and Associated Web Pages

The RFC Series is continually evolving as a document series. This document focuses on the fundamental and stable requirements that must be met by an RFC. From time to time, the RFC Editor may offer less formal recommendations that authors may apply at their discretion; these recommendations may be found on the RFC Editor website "Guidelines for RFC Style" [STYLE-WEB].

When a new recommendation is made regarding the overall structure and formatting of the RFCs, it will be published on that page and accepted for a period of time before the RFC Editor determines whether it should become part of the fundamental requirements in the RFC Style Guide or remain as a less formal recommendation. That period of time will vary in part depending on the frequency with which authors encounter and apply the guidance.

Acknowledgements
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