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        Recommendations of a committee on RFC citation issues
                draft-carpenter-rfc-citation-recs-01

Abstract

   The Transitional RFC Editor set up a small committee in 2010 to look
   into several issues concerning citations of, and within, RFCs. This
   report summarizes the committee's recommendations.

Status of this Memo

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

   Internet-Drafts are working documents of the Internet Engineering
   Task Force (IETF). Note that other groups may also distribute
   working documents as Internet-Drafts. The list of current Internet-
   Drafts is at http://datatracker.ietf.org/drafts/current/.

   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."

   This Internet-Draft will expire on August 26, 2011.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

   In July 2010, Glenn Kowack, the transitional RFC Editor (TRSE), set
   up a small committee to look into issues concerning citations of RFCs
   by other documents, and concerning how citations within RFCs, whether
   they be of RFCs, Internet-Drafts, or other documents. This document
   constitutes the committee's report and recommendations.

   The matters considered by the committee were:
   1. Determine the right ISSN entry format for the RFC series and
       recommend how to ensure it is appropriately catalogued
       internationally.
   2. Determine how documents in the RFC series should cite other RFCs.
   3. Determine how documents in the RFC series should cite Internet-
       Drafts.
   4. Recommend how RFCs should be cited using the ACM, IEEE and MLA
       reference formats.
   5. Recommend how RFCs should be represented in BibTex.

   Over the course of its deliberations, the committee added an
   additional issue:
   1. Whether to list all initials for authors.

   We now discuss these items in turn, with our conclusions and
   recommendations.

2. International Standard Serial Number (ISSN)

   An ISSN is an eight digit number that uniquely identifies a paper or
   electronic series publication such as a scientific journal; all
   issues of a given journal carry the same ISSN. It is used in both
   traditional and on-line library catalogues and the like, and is
   mentioned in some scholarly publications as part of a citation,
   although this is relatively rare. The RFC Series has ISSN 2070-1721.

   The ISSN does not convey any particular status; it is just intended
   as an aid for identification, cataloguing and searching. It applies
   retroactively to the entire RFC series. We make two recommendations:
   1. The ISSN should be included when RFCs are cited, but only in
       cases where the same is done for other series publications.
   2. The RFC Editor should take steps to ensure that the current ISSN
       registration held by issn.org and the appropriate entry at
       http://www.worldcat.org are up to date and accurate.

   Note: The current registration entry includes

```
Publisher
Marina del Rey, CA : IETF Trust

Issuing body (as on the piece)
IETF Trust
Issuing body (as on the piece)
Internet Engineering Task Force
Issuing body (as on the piece)
IETF
```

The fact that the IETF Trust holds copyright does not make it the
publisher. We RECOMMEND that both the publisher and the issuing body
should be shown as "RFC Editor". This is much less prone to error
than showing the various RFC streams as the issuing body.

3. How documents in the RFC series should cite other RFCs

We have seen no convincing arguments for changing the current style
and format, illustrated here [RFC2629] and in the References section
below.

An alternative style used in some RFCs is a numeric label such as [1]
instead of a symbolic label. We consider this acceptable for RFCs
containing many references where the symbolic style would be visually
confusing.

4. How documents in the RFC series should cite Internet-Drafts

The committee observed that Internet-Drafts are now widely cited.
The reasons vary from establishing when an idea was developed (e.g.
for patent purposes), to documenting design paths not followed, or
simply giving credit for an idea where credit is due. Furthermore,
for some of these purposes, the particular instantiation of the
Internet-Draft matters as different drafts contain different
information.

There are multiple RFC publication streams.[RFC 4844] Different RFC
publication streams might have different policies and practices with
respect to an RFC citing an Internet-Draft.[RFC 4844] This document
is merely the report of an ad-hoc committee to the RFC Editor. As
such, this document does not create or modify any stream-specific
policies or practices about whether or when an RFC might cite an
Internet-Draft. Authors and editors of documents intended for RFC
publication should consult stream-specific authorities to learn the
policies and practices applicable to the various document streams.

Some RFC publication streams at present do permit some citations of
Internet-Drafts under some circumstances. So this committee could
not ignore the question of how an RFC should cite an Internet-Draft.
This committee focused purely on the practical issues of how an RFC
citation of an Internet-Draft should be formatted.

In this light, the committee RECOMMENDS that, except in standards
track documents, the RFC Editor permit the citation of Internet-
Drafts in RFCs. For the reasons discussed below, we also RECOMMEND
updating the current practices for citing Internet-Drafts.

Current practice is based on a strict interpretation of [RFC2026]:

An Internet-Draft is NOT a means of "publishing" a specification;
specifications are published through the RFC mechanism described in
the previous section. Internet-Drafts have no formal status, and are
subject to change or removal at any time.

```
    ***********************************************************
    *                                                         *
    *    Under no circumstances should an Internet-Draft     *
    *    be referenced by any paper, report, or Request-     *
    *    for-Proposal, nor should a vendor claim compliance  *
    *    with an Internet-Draft.                             *
    *                                                         *
    ***********************************************************
```

Note: It is acceptable to reference a standards-track specification
that may reasonably be expected to be published as an RFC using the
phrase "Work in Progress" without referencing an Internet-Draft.

Thus, a recent citation today reads:

    [MIF-PRACTICE]   Wasserman, M. and P. Seite, "Current Practices for
                     Multiple Interface Hosts", Work in Progress,
                     August 2010.

Such a citation raises several possible problems:
1. It does not suffice for a reader who wishes to locate a copy,
    because it does not include the relevant file name. If the user
    finds a document with the same title, there is no certainty that
    it is the version cited.

2. Furthermore, citing only the month of publication does not
    identify the version, if the document has been frequently
    updated. Indeed even citing the exact day of publication is
    insufficient; Internet-Drafts are sometimes updated more than
    once a day.
3. In some circumstances, an RFC might need to cite more than one
    version of the same draft (for example, when comparing
    alternative proposed solutions). This compunds the previous
    issue.
4. The phrase "Work in Progress" may be misleading or simply
    incorrect when referring to an older draft that has in fact been
    abandoned by its authors.

Our discussions did not lead to a simple solution to these problems.
We RECOMMEND that
1. The RFC Editor should include the exact publication date in the
    citation of an Internet-Draft.
2. Authors should be allowed to cite several versions of the same
    draft.
3. The RFC Editor is encouraged include the full Internet-Draft file
    name in citations.
4. A citation of an Internet-Draft should use the phrase "Working
    Draft" rather than "Work in Progress" whenever appropriate.
    (Stream-specific policies and practices might prohibit this
    practice within certain RFC document streams.)

[5]. Citing RFCs from Other Documents

We believe that RFCs should be treated as scholarly publications for
citation purposes [CCR]. Clearly, the exact format depends on the
citation style adopted by a particular publisher.

The Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and the
Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) are professional societies.
Both publish a number of journals and conference proceedings in which
RFCs are cited. The Modern Library Association (MLA) standards are
widely used for doctoral dissertations in the United States.

The committee discovered that while IEEE and ACM have canonical
formats for citations, it turns out that their conferences and
journals routinely are allowed to adopt different formats and do so.
What does seem to be common is that virtually every journal and
conference and dissertation preparation package knows how to
translate a BIBTEX reference into the conference's or journal's
preferred form.

Accordingly, rather than worry about each citation format

individually, the committee chose to focus on getting the BIBTEX
representation discussed in the next section in a form that would
lead to clear, consistent, and effective citations.

5.1. **General Advice on Citing RFCs**

The committee's BibTeX discussions were guided by the following
decisions regarding how we felt RFCs should be cited.
1.   The publisher, institution, or organization is identified as the
     "RFC Editor" (not the IETF, the IRTF, the IETF Trust, the
     Internet Society, etc.).
2.   The copyright holder is "The IETF Trust".
3.   The ISSN is 2070-1721.
4.   If a series name is required, it should be "Internet Requests for
     Comment".
5.   The volume number is the RFC number itself, e.g. "RFC 2026".
6.   The correct typography includes a blank space. Both "RFC2026"
     and "RFC-2026" are incorrect as a descriptive term.
7.   The URL format is http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc####.txt where
     #### is replaced with the four digit RFC number (for numbers
     below 1000, there is no leading 0).
8.   Some RFCs are collective works attributed to editors, rather than
     authors. This should be indicated in the citation.

5.2. **BibTeX Entries for RFCs**

At present, a very wide range of different BibTeX entry types are
used (e.g. @ARTICLE, @MISC, @TECHREPORT) which often yields
incomplete and inconsistent citations. Also, a wide range of values
have been used for PUBLISHER or INSTITUTION over the years. We hope
to reduce inconsistency, increase accuracy, and also improve clarity
of RFC citations by specifying a standard BibTeX entry format for use
in citing RFCs.

All RFCs receive substantial review prior to publication. While RFCs
published on different tracks have slight variances in the review
process (e.g. IRTF track RFCs are reviewed by the IRSG before
publication, while IETF track RFCs are reviewed by the IESG instead),
all RFCs receive substantial technical review prior to publication.
[RFC 5741][RFC 5742][RFC 5743] In most cases, an RFC has also had
significant public review within the Internet engineering and
research community prior to publication as an RFC. As such, all RFCs
are reviewed publications; in many cases they are peer-reviewed
[CCR].

We mention this here in part because some organisational technical
reports, which might also be cited using the @TECHREPORT BibTeX entry
type, are not normally peer-reviewed prior to publication as a

   technical report.

   We RECOMMEND that all authors citing RFCs from documents other than
   RFCs and Internet-Drafts use the @TECHREPORT{} entry type, with the
   fields and values illustrated in the example below. When an RFC
   includes the day of the month when it was published, it also is
   important to include the day in the BibTeX entry. Many RFCs list
   only month and year, as in the example entry below.

   We also RECOMMEND that the RFC Editor create and maintain a canonical
   BibTeX file at a stable public location on the web server "www.rfc-
   editor.org", so that authors using BibTeX can easily obtain a BibTeX
   file with all issued RFCs.

   @techreport{rfc1654,
   AUTHOR = "Yakov Rekhter and Tony Li",
   TITLE = "{A Border Gateway Protocol 4 (BGP-4)}",
   HOWPUBLISHED = {Internet Requests for Comments},
   TYPE="{RFC}",
   NUMBER=1654,
   PAGES = {1-56},
   YEAR = {1995},
   MONTH = {July},
   ISSN = {2070-1721},
   PUBLISHER = "{RFC Editor}",
   INSTITUTION = "{RFC Editor}",
   URL={http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc1654.txt}
   }

6. Citing Internet-Drafts from Other Documents

   Many documents written and published outside the RFC process cite
   Internet-Drafts, despite their ephemeral and unpublished nature. The
   question of whether a particular publisher or publication permits
   citation of Internet-Drafts is outside the scope of this committee
   report. The committee focused purely on developing guidance for
   formatting citation of Internet-Drafts by other documents.

   Unlike RFCs, Internet-Drafts have no formal status and are intended
   for short-term use, such as draft development. Each version of each
   Internet-Draft expires after 6 months. In many cases the draft is
   revised and a new version of that Internet-Draft then becomes valid.

   As working documents, the level to which an Internet-Draft has been
   reviewed varies widely. Internet-Drafts actively being worked on as
   official IAB, IESG, IETF WG, or IRTF RG drafts are often being

carefully reviewed and edited. Other Internet-Drafts also may have
been widely circulated for review and reflect careful editng.
However, it is impossible to determine the level of review and
editing simply by looking at the origin of an Internet-Draft.

[RFC 2026] specifies that active IETF stream Internet-Drafts be cited
as "Work in Progress". This has created some confusion, especially
in the case where a draft being cited has both expired and also is
not actively being worked on.

We RECOMMEND that "Working Draft" be used for IETF stream Internet-
Drafts that have expired and are no longer part of an active IETF
initiative. A good sign of such cases is when a newer draft has been
released or a draft has been expired for over a year. For all other
publishing streams, we RECOMMEND that "Working Draft" be used to
characterize all Internet-Drafts.

As with RFCs, rather than worry about each citation format
individually, the committee chose to focus on getting the BIBTEX
representation in a form that will consistently lead to effective
citations.

6.1. General Advice on Citing Internet-Drafts

The committee's BibTeX discussions were guided by the following
decisions regarding how we felt Internet-Drafts should be cited.
1. Internet-Drafts are not published documents, so there is no
    publisher. As such, don't include a publisher in the BibTeX
    entry or printed citation of an Internet-Draft.
2. At present, all Internet-Drafts, regardless of intended document
    track, are processed and made available by the IETF Secretariat.
    So the ORGANIZATION or INSTITUTION field should contain: "IETF
    Secretariat".
3. The copyright holder is: "The IETF Trust".
4. There is no ISSN, because an Internet-Draft has not been
    published.
5. If a series name is required, it should be: "Internet Drafts"
6. The number field should be the complete filename of the Internet-
    Draft being cited. Normally this SHOULD be the text version, as
    that is the canonical version. In special situations, for
    example where complex equations or drawings are included, an
    alternative version (e.g. HTML, PDF) MAY be referenced.
7. While many modern Internet-Drafts are available from an IETF
    Secretariat tools web site even after expiration, normally the
    URL for the Internet Draft SHOULD be omitted from the BibTeX
    entry. In special situations, for example an older Internet-
    Draft whose online location is obscure, a URL MAY be included.

8. Some Internet-Drafts are collective works attributed to editors,
    rather than authors. This should be indicated in the citation.
9. For IETF stream drafts, HOWPUBLISHED MUST be "Work in Progress".
    For other Internet-Drafts, the HOWPUBLISHED field SHOULD read
    "Working Draft" instead.

6.2. BibTeX Entries for Internet Drafts

   At present, a very wide range of different BibTeX entry types are
   used (e.g. @ARTICLE, @MISC, @TECHREPORT) which often yields
   incomplete and inconsistent citations. Also, a wide range of values
   have been used for PUBLISHER or INSTITUTION over the years. We hope
   to reduce inconsistency, increase accuracy, and also improve clarity
   of Internet-Draft citations by specifying a standard BibTeX entry
   format for use in citing them.

   We RECOMMEND that all authors citing Internet-Drafts from documents
   other than RFCs and Internet-Drafts use the @TECHREPORT{} entry type,
   with the fields and values illustrated in the example below. It is
   important to include the full date and full Internet-Draft filename
   within the BibTeX entry in order to make the precise intended
   document and document version clear.

```
@TECHREPORT{draft-ipng-gseaddr-00.txt,
AUTHOR="M. O'Dell",
TITLE="{GSE: An Alternate Addressing Architecture for IPv6}",
HOWPUBLISHED="{Working Draft}",
TYPE="{Internet-Draft}",
NUMBER="draft-ipng-gseaddr-00.txt",
INSTITUTION="{IETF Secretariat}",
DAY=24,
MONTH=Feb,
YEAR=1997
}
```

7. Authors Initials

   While looking at how RFCs and Internet-Drafts are cited, the
   committee noted that many authors citing RFCs or Internet-Drafts
   composed the citation only from either the first page of the cited
   document or only from the RFC Index (e.g. rfc-index.txt). The
   committee observed that the practice of limiting ourselves to a
   single author initial in RFCs and Internet-Drafts thereby
   occasionally leads to uncertainty about who authored or edited the
   document being cited.

   The solution is clear but inevitably requires a change to RFC and

Internet-Draft document formats. The committee RECOMMENDS that ALL
of an author's initials be included both when the author's name is
listed on the front page of the RFC or Internet-Draft, at the foot of
each page and in author contact information. We further RECOMMEND
that this practice carry over into citations and that all author
initials be included in any citation.

8. Security Considerations

Accurate and up to date references are important to ensure that all
those involved in specifying, implementing, operating, and using
Internet protocols apply the best possible security measures.

9. IANA Considerations

This document makes no request of the IANA.

10. Acknowledgements

The committee members were Ran Atkinson, Brian Carpenter, Dave
Crocker, Paul Hoffman, Craig Partridge, Julian Reschke and Peter
Saint-Andre. The committee was convened by Craig Partridge,
occasionally assisted by Brian Carpenter.

Useful comments and contributions were made by ....

This document was produced using the xml2rfc tool [RFC2629].

11. Informative References

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