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Requirements for Plain Text RFCs
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Abstract

This draft documents the change in requirements and layout for the plain-text RFC publication format.

Editorial Note (To be removed by the RFC Editor)

Discussion of this draft takes place on the rfc-interest mailing list (rfc-interest@rfc-editor.org), which has its home page at <https://www.rfc-editor.org/mailman/listinfo/rfc-interest>.

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[1.](#) Introduction

One of the requirements documented in [RFC 6949](#) [[RFC6949](#)], "RFC Series Format Requirements and Future Development," is the continued support for a plain text publication format.

The Unicode Consortium defines 'plain text' as "Computer-encoded text that consists only of a sequence of code points from a given standard, with no other formatting or structural information. Plain text interchange is commonly used between computer systems that do not share higher-level protocols." [[unicode-glossary](#)]

While a plain text output for RFCs will continue to be required for the foreseeable future, the details of what that means for RFCs in terms of which character encoding may be used, what the page layout will look like, how to handle figures and artwork, and so on, are documented in this draft.

The following assumptions drive the changes in the plain text output for RFCs:

- o The existing tools to create the text file are extremely sensitive; manual manipulation is required in the final output. In particular, handling page breaks for text is tricky.
- o Additional publication formats--for example: PDF, HTML-- will be available that will offer features such as markup, pagination, etc.

2. Character Encoding

The character encoding for all plain text documents will be UTF-8 [[RFC3629](#)]. The file will include a byte order mark (BOM) to provide text reader software with in-band information about the character encoding scheme used.

3. Figures and Artwork

Authors may continue to include figures drawn with ASCII characters. If the canonical format includes figures or artwork other than ASCII-art, then the plain text output must include a pointer to the HTML version of the RFC to allow readers to see the relevant artwork.

Authors who wish to include ASCII-art for the plain text file and SVG art for the other outputs may do so, but they should be aware of the potential for confusion to individuals reading the RFC with two unique diagrams describing the same content.

ASCII art will have a character width limit of no more than 85 characters.

4. Page Layout

Pagination is no longer required. Line lengths for both text and artwork, will increase to 85 characters.

4.1. Headers and Footers

The front matter on the front page (such as the RFC number and category), and the back matter on the last page (the author's full names and contact information) will continue with the structure described in [RFC 5741](#) [[RFC5741](#)], "RFC Streams, Headers, and Boilerplates". Given the removal of the pagination requirement, running headers and footers will no longer exist.

4.2. Table of Contents

Given the removal of the pagination requirement, the Table of Contents will list section and subsection numbers and titles, but will not include page numbers.

5. Acknowledgements

This draft owes a great deal of thanks to the efforts of the RFC Format Design Team: Nevil Brownlee, Tony Hansen, Joe Hildebrand, Paul Hoffman, Ted Lemon, Julian Reschke, Adam Roach, Alice Russo, Robert Sparks, and David Thaler

6. IANA Considerations

This memo includes no requests to IANA.

7. Security Considerations

TBD.

8. References

8.1. Normative References

- [RFC3629] Yergeau, F., "UTF-8, a transformation format of ISO 10646", STD 63, [RFC 3629](#), November 2003.
- [RFC5741] Daigle, L., Kolkman, O., and IAB, "RFC Streams, Headers, and Boilerplates", [RFC 5741](#), December 2009.
- [RFC6949] Flanagan, H. and N. Brownlee, "RFC Series Format Requirements and Future Development", [RFC 6949](#), May 2013.

8.2. Informative References

- [unicode-glossary]
The Unicode Consortium, "Glossary of Unicode Terms", 2014,
<<http://www.unicode.org/glossary/>>.

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