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**Requirements for Plain Text RFCs**  
**draft-flanagan-plaintext-01**

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>.

Status of This Memo

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## [1.](#) Introduction

In 2013, after a great deal of community discussion, the decision was made to shift from the plain text, ASCII-only canonical format to XML [[XML-ANNOUNCE](#)]. The high-level requirements for the format of RFCs were defined in RFC Series Format Requirements and Future Development [[RFC6949](#)]. Several different publication formats will be rendered from that canonical XML, including HTML, PDF, TXT, and EPUB.

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 pagination 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, pretty printing, etc.
- o There is an extensive tool chain in existence among the community to work with plain text documents. Similar functionality may be possible with other publication formats, but the workflow that uses the existing tool chain must be supported as much as is considered practical.

## **2. Character Encoding**

The use of non-ASCII characters will be allowed in a limited and controlled fashion. The details regarding the guidance for how to include non-ASCII characters is under development and documented in The Use of Non-ASCII Characters in RFCs [[I-D.flanagan-nonascii](#)]. Please view the PDF version of that draft.

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**

Arguments both in favor of and against pagination have been offered by members of the community and summarized in [RFC 6949](#). After further discussion, two plain text outputs will be created during the publication process - one with basic pagination that includes a form feed instruction every 58 lines at most, depending on the text and artwork layout, and a second with no pagination at all. This will allow for both easier cut and paste from the plain text file, uninterrupted diff output, better understanding when you can't tell if



a page break is also a paragraph break, and a better printing experience for those working with the plain text output .

Line lengths for both text and artwork, will increase to 80 characters in order to take advantage of wider screens and unnecessarily wide page margins.

#### **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**

- [I-D.flanagan-nonascii]  
Flanagan, H., "The Use of Non-ASCII Characters in RFCs",  
[draft-flanagan-nonascii-01](#) (work in progress), April 2014.
- [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**

[XML-ANNOUNCE]

Flanagan, H., "'Subject: Direction of the RFC Format Development effort", message to the rfc-interest@rfc-editor.org mailing list", May 2013, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/pipermail/rfc-interest/2013-May/005584.html> >.

[unicode-glossary]

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

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