



IETF 87 - fixing I18N in Basic authentication

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Problem description

In Basic authentication, the on-the-wire credentials are:

1. Obtained from the user, who at some point types a sequence of characters
2. `concat(id, ":", password)`
3. *unspecified magic transforms characters into an octet sequence*
4. base64-encode the octet sequence

In step 3, we need a character encoding scheme. Some UAs currently use UTF-8, some ISO-8859-1 (or even the system locale, or derive something from a referring page).

It appears that UA cannot realistically change the default as it will break at least *some* sites that now work (for some value of "work").

Proposed solution

Leave the default undefined. UAs can continue to do what they do now. No disruption.

Allow the server to express a encoding preference of "UTF-8". (Yes, just that).

Example:

```
WWW-Authenticate: Basic realm="foo", charset="UTF-8"
```

Why not a complete spec?

I would prefer to have proof that this will work in practice before issuing a standards-track document.

Out of scope

- Changing the nature of "Basic"
- Allowing ":" in id

Open issues

- What do we need to say about Unicode normalization?
- Is this both implementable and deployable? (see discussion in [Mozilla Bug 656213](#))

Next Steps

WGLC?

Get support into at least one user agent and one web server.

Once this works in practice, issue a complete replacement spec for the "Basic" bits of RFC 2617.

Links

[draft-ietf-httpauth-basicauth-enc-01](#) (HTML)

[httpauth WG SVN @ tools.ietf.org](#)

[Test Cases](#) (related to parsing WWW-Authenticate)