

Tips for Writing a Document

1. Start with a template so you can focus on the content.

For XML: <http://tools.ietf.org/tools/templates/draft-davies-template-bare.txt>

For NROFF: built in to NroffEdit (<http://aaa-sec.com/nroffedit/>). Select File > New Draft from Template.

For more information: http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc-editor/tools_87.pdf

2. Read your document out loud, then revise. Ask multiple people to read it, then revise. Repeat.

3. Review your document for common grammar and style issues. (Below, examples are preceded by "Ex:".)

- Subject and verb agreement: If the subject is singular, then use a singular verb (and vice versa).

Ex: Using the mechanisms and procedures are important. (Incorrect.)

--> Using the mechanisms and procedures *is* important. (Correct; the subject is "using".)

- Misplaced modifiers: When a phrase modifies the wrong noun, see if you can rephrase.

Ex: It should accept the packet sent to the node that has an invalid value. (Incorrect.)

--> It should accept the packet that was sent to the node *and has an invalid value*.

(Correct; assuming the intended meaning is the packet, not the node, has the invalid value.)

- Ambiguous pronouns: Check for pronouns (e.g., "it", "they") that might be more clear as the noun.

Ex: For each broadcast network, a designated router describes it in its network-LSA.

(Note: The "it" and "its" need clarification.)

- Using abbreviations and apostrophes: Careful of plural vs. possessive.

Ex: the LSRs (plural)
 the LSR's address (singular possessive)
 the LSRs' addresses (plural possessive)

- Articles: definite ("the") vs. indefinite ("a"/"an") vs. none

This is a tricky aspect of the English language.

Ex: the router (definite: a specific one)
 a router (indefinite: a nonspecific one)
 routers (no article: in general, or all of them)

- Defining terminology and notation

- Refer to existing RFCs on the topic. Ex: This document uses the terminology defined in [RFC6275].
- Define terms or notation that are not well known. Ex: "|" represents foo in this document.
- Ideally, a term appears consistently throughout the document in terms of capitalization, etc.
Ex: white space vs. whitespace vs. 'whitespace' vs. Whitespace

4. If your document is approved for publication, provide directives to the RFC Editor -- e.g., if specific terms must appear a certain way (spelling, hyphenation, capitalization), please email rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org.

Additionally, RFC style guidance recommends the following.

- **Abbreviations and acronyms:** Expand, upon first use, abbreviations that are not well known. See <http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc-style-guide/abbrev.expansion.txt>

- **Punctuation**

- The series comma (before the last item in a series) is used.
Ex: It requires source, destination, and x values.
- A comma is used after an introductory phrase. (Ex: In contrast, this mechanism ...)
- i.e., ("that is") vs. e.g., ("for example"): use periods and comma. (Note: They have different meanings.)

- **Citations:** They do not contain a space. Ex: See [RFC5234], but in text simply RFC 5234.

- **Titles:** Each word is capitalized except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions.

- **Hyphenation:** Generally, a compound acting as an adjective before the noun is hyphenated.
Ex: It is a 3-bit field. vs. The field is 3 bits. (Both are correct.)

- **Usage of "that" vs. "which"**

- **that:** restrictive - introduces information that is essential to the meaning of the sentence
Ex: RST attacks that rely on brute force are relatively easy to detect at the TCP layer.
(meaning only some RST attacks rely on brute force)
- **which:** non-restrictive - follows a comma and provides non-essential information
Ex: RST attacks, which rely on brute force, are relatively easy to detect at the TCP layer.
(meaning all RST attacks rely on brute force)

- **Numbers:** Use numerals when referring to bits, TLVs, specific values, etc. Use the spelled-out form when being used in general text.

Ex: The field is set to 3.

Ex: There are five options.

Reference Guides:

RFC Editor Style Guide

<http://www.rfc-editor.org/styleguide.html>

Chicago Manual of Style

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.com>

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

<http://www.m-w.com>

Contact the RFC Editor:

rfc-editor@rfc-editor.org

For RFC Editor policies & FAQ:

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

What does the RFC Editor do?

The world of technical publishing has generally accepted standards for the rules for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, sentence length and complexity, parallelism, etc. The RFC Editor follows these accepted standards, but with particular exceptions. There are a few specific rule variants that have been imposed on RFCs to avoid ambiguity in complex technical prose and to handle mixtures of text and computer languages. There is also a prime directive that must rule over style conventions: do not change the intended meaning of the text. The RFC Editor strives to respect the long history of individuality in the IETF community. We generally allow some variant formatting and style, as long as it is consistent.

RFC Editor Goals:

- Prepare document to RFC style and format.
- Get the document as clear and correct as possible. This includes grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax.
- Look for larger content/clarity issues; flag any unclear passages for author review.
- Make document more consistent (e.g., terms that appear in various forms, text that appears multiple times).