REUSE Specification – Version 3.0

This document is based on REUSE.software, a project launched by FSFE, and redistributed under CC-0 with their kind permission.

This specification defines a standardized method for declaring copyright and licensing for software projects. The goal of the specification is to have unambiguous, human- and machine-readable copyright and licensing information for each individual file in a project. Ideally this information is embedded into every file, so that the information is preserved when the file is copied and reused by third parties.

This specification implements [IETF RFC 2119: Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels](https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc2119).

For the revision history of this specification, please see [the change log](https://git.fsfe.org/reuse/docs/src/branch/main/CHANGELOG.md).

Definitions

These are the definitions for some of the terms used in this specification:

* REUSE Tool — helper tool for compliance with this Specification; available at <https://github.com/fsfe/reuse-tool>.
* Project — any unit of content that can be associated with a distribution of software. Typically, a Project is composed of one or more files. Also sometimes called a package.
* License File — a file containing the text of a license.
* Copyright and Licensing Information — the information that lists the copyright holders of a file or work, and describes under which licenses the file or work is made available.
* Covered File — any file in a Project, except for
  + The License Files.
  + The files belonging to the Project’s version control system (example: .git/).
  + The files ignored by the version control system (example: Files listed in .gitignore).
  + The files in the .reuse/ directory in the root of the Project. This directory MUST contain only files relevant for the operation of the REUSE Tool.
* SPDX Specification — SPDX specification, version 2.1; as available on <https://spdx.org/specifications>.
* SPDX License Identifier — SPDX short-form identifier, as defined in SPDX Specification. See also <https://spdx.org/ids> for a short introduction and examples.
* SPDX License Expression — as defined in SPDX Specification, Appendix IV, at <https://spdx.org/spdx-specification-21-web-version#h.jxpfx0ykyb60>.
* SPDX License List — a list of commonly found licenses and exceptions; as available on <https://spdx.org/licenses/>.
* DEP5 — [Machine-readable debian/copyright file, Version 1.0](https://www.debian.org/doc/packaging-manuals/copyright-format/1.0/). Where the REUSE Specification and DEP5 state different things, the REUSE Specification takes precedence. Specifically in the case of the Copyright and License tags.

License Files

A Project MUST include a License File for every license under which Covered Files are licensed.

Each License File MUST be placed in the LICENSES/ directory in the root of the Project. The name of the License File MUST be the SPDX License Identifier of the license followed by an appropriate file extension (example: LICENSES/GPL-3.0-or-later.txt). The License File MUST be in plain text format.

If a license does not exist in the SPDX License List, its SPDX License Identifier MUST be LicenseRef-[idstring] as defined by the SPDX Specification, Section 6 available at <https://spdx.org/spdx-specification-21-web-version#h.1v1yuxt>.

A Project MUST NOT include License Files for licenses under which none of the files in the Project are licensed.

Everything that applies to licenses in this section also applies to license exceptions, with the exception that it is NOT possible to have a license exception that does not exist in the SPDX License List.

For avoidance of doubt, in practice this means that for every license and exception that is part of any SPDX License Expression in any Copyright and Licensing Information associated with any Covered File, there MUST exist a License File as defined in this section.

Copyright and Licensing Information

Each Covered File MUST have Copyright and Licensing Information associated with it. There are two ways to associate Copyright and Licensing Information with a file.

Comment headers

To implement this method, each plain text file that can contain comments MUST contain comments at the top of the file (comment header) that declare that file’s Copyright and Licensing Information.

If a file is not a plain text file or does not permit the inclusion of comments, the comment header that declares the file’s Copyright and Licensing Information SHOULD be in an adjacent file of the same name with the additional extension .license (example: cat.jpg.license if the original file is cat.jpg).

The comment header MUST contain one or more SPDX-FileCopyrightText tags, and one or more SPDX-License-Identifier tags. A tag is followed by a colon, followed by a text value, and terminated by a newline.

The SPDX-FileCopyrightText tag MUST be followed by a copyright notice.

Instead of the SPDX-FileCopyrightText tag, the symbol ©, or the word Copyright MAY be used, in which case a colon is not needed.

The SPDX-License-Identifier tag MUST be followed by a valid SPDX License Expression describing the licensing of the file (example: SPDX-License-Identifier: GPL-3.0-or-later OR Apache-2.0). If separate sections of the file are licensed differently, a different SPDX-License-Identifier tag MUST be included for each section.

An example of a comment header:

# SPDX-FileCopyrightText: 2016, 2018-2019 Jane Doe <jane@example.com>

# SPDX-FileCopyrightText: 2019 Example Company

#

# SPDX-License-Identifier: GPL-3.0-or-later

DEP5

Alternatively, Copyright and Licensing Information MAY be associated with a file through a DEP5 file. The intended use case of this method is large directories where including a comment header in each file (or in .license companion files) is impossible or undesirable.

The DEP5 file MUST be named dep5 and stored in the .reuse/ directory in the root of the Project (i.e. .reuse/dep5).

The License tag MUST be followed by a valid SPDX License Expression describing the licensing of the associated files.

The Copyright tag MUST be followed by a copyright notice.

An example of a DEP5 file:

Format: https://www.debian.org/doc/packaging-manuals/copyright-format/1.0/

Upstream-Name: Project

Upstream-Contact: Jane Doe <jane@example.com>

Source: https://example.com/jane/project

Files: po/\*

Copyright: 2019 Translation Company

License: GPL-3.0-or-later

Format of copyright notices

A copyright notice MUST be prefixed by a tag, symbol or word denoting a copyright notice as described in this specification.

The copyright notice MUST contain the name of the copyright holder. The copyright notice SHOULD contain the year of publication and the contact address of the copyright holder. The order of these items SHOULD be: year, name, contact address.

The year of publication MAY be a single year, multiple years, or a span of years.

The copyright holder MAY be an individual, list of individuals, group, legal entity, or any other descriptor by which one can easily identify the copyright holder(s).

Any contact address SHOULD be in between angle brackets.

Examples of valid copyright notices:

SPDX-FileCopyrightText: 2019 Jane Doe <jane@example.com>

SPDX-FileCopyrightText: © 2019 John Doe <joe@example.com>

© Example Corporation <https://corp.example.com>

Copyright 2016, 2018-2019 Joe Anybody

Copyright (c) Alice