



# **DRAFT Technical Specification**

**ISO/DIS TS 25755**

**Programming Languages — C — defer, a mechanism  
for general purpose, lexical scope-based undo**

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## Foreword

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This document was prepared by Joint Technical Committee ISO/IEC JTC 1, Information technology, Subcommittee SC 22, Programming languages, their environments and system software interfaces.

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## Introduction

The advent of resource leaks in programs created with ISO/IEC 9899 — Programming Language, C has necessitated the need for better ways of tracking and automatically releasing resources in a given scope. This document provides a feature to address this need in a reliable, translation-time, opt-in manner for implementations to furnish to programmers.

This document is divided into four major subdivisions:

- preliminary elements (Clauses 1-4);
- the characteristics of environments that translate and execute C programs (Clause 5);
- the language syntax, constraints, and semantics (Clause 6);
- the library facilities (Clause 7).

In any given subsequent clause or subclause, there are section delineations in bold to describe the semantics, restrictions, and behaviors of programs for this language and potentially the use of its library clauses in this document:

- **Syntax**  
which pertains to the spelling and organization of the language and library;
- **Constraints**  
which detail and enumerate various requirements for the correct interpretation of the language and library, typically during translation;
- **Semantics**  
which explain the behavior of language features and similar constructs;
- **Description**  
which explain the behavior of library usage and similar constructs;
- **Returns**  
which describes the effects of constructs provided back to a user of the library;
- **Recommended practice**  
which provides guidance and important considerations for implementers of this document.

Examples are provided to illustrate possible forms of the constructions described. Footnotes are provided to emphasize consequences of the rules described in that subclause or elsewhere in this document. References are used to refer to other related subclauses. Recommendations are provided to give advice or guidance to implementers.

Additionally, references internal to clauses and subclauses in this document are specified by a stable tag that begins with a “[”, proceeds with a list of letters, numbers, hyphens, and periods, and a final, terminating “]”.

## 1. Scope [scope]

This Technical Specification specifies a series of extensions of the programming language C, specified by the international standard ISO/IEC 9899:2024.

Each clause in this Technical Specification deals with a specific topic. The first sub-clauses of clauses 4 through 7 contain a technical description of the features of the topic and what is necessary for an implementation to achieve conformance through extensions or additions to ISO/IEC 9899:2024.

## 2. Normative References [normrefs]

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC 9899:2024, Programming languages — C

## 3. Terms and definitions [defn]

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions of ISO/IEC 9899:2024 apply.

## 4. Conformance [conf]

The requirements from ISO/IEC 9899:2024, clause 4 apply without any additional requirements in this document.

## 5. Environment [env]

### 5.1. General [env-general]

The requirements from ISO/IEC 9899:2024, clause 5 apply along with the following additional requirements to support the **defer** feature.

### 5.2. Program termination [env-prog.term]

#### Semantics

If the return type of the main function is a type compatible with `int`, a return from the initial call to the main function is equivalent to calling the `exit` function with the value returned by the main function as its argument after all `defer` statements that are in scope for the main function have been executed.

## 6. Language [lang]

## 6.1. General

❓ [lang-general]

The requirements from ISO/IEC 9899:2024, clause 6 apply along with the following additional requirements to support the **defer** feature.

## 6.2. Keywords

❓ [keywords]

In addition to the keywords in ISO/IEC 9899:2024 §6.4.2, an implementation shall additionally recognize **defer** as a keyword.

### Recommended practice

An additional keyword **\_Defer** should be provided as an alternative spelling for the **defer** keyword, in conjunction with the recommended practice in [**stddefer.hdr**]. It should have all the significance of the **defer** keyword described in this document. This can aid in portability.

## 6.3. Statements

❓ [statements]

In addition to the statements in ISO/IEC 9899:2024 §6.8, implementations shall allow the unlabeled statement grammar production to produce a defer statement which contains a deferred block. A deferred block is also considered a *block* just like a primary block or a secondary block.

### Syntax

*unlabeled-statement:*

*expression-statement*  
*attribute-specifier-sequence<sub>opt</sub> primary-block*  
*attribute-specifier-sequence<sub>opt</sub> jump-statement*  
*attribute-specifier-sequence<sub>opt</sub> defer-statement*

*deferred-block:*

*unlabeled-statement*

## 6.4. Defer statements

❓ [defer]

### Syntax

*defer-statement:*

**defer** *deferred-block*

### Description

Let *D* be a defer statement, *S* be the deferred block of *D*, and *E* be the enclosing block of *D*. The scope of *D* is the same as an identifier declared and completed immediately after the end of *S*.

### Constraints

Jumps by means of:

- goto or switch shall not jump into any defer statement;

- goto or switch shall not jump from outside the scope of a defer statement *D* to inside that scope;
- and, return, break, continue or goto shall not exit *S*.

## Semantics

When execution reaches a defer statement *D* and its scope is entered, its *S* is not immediately executed during sequential execution of the program. Instead, for the duration of the scope of *D*, *S* is executed upon:

- the termination of the block *E* and/or the scope of *D* (such as from reaching its end);
- or, any exit from *E* and/or the scope of *D* through return, goto, break, or continue.

❓ The execution is done just before leaving the enclosing block *E* and/or the scope of *D*. In particular return expressions (and conversion to return values) are calculated before executing *S*.

Multiple defer statements execute their *S* in the reverse order they appeared in *E*. Within a single defer statement *D*, if *D* contains one or more defer statements *D<sub>sub</sub>* of its own, then the *S<sub>sub</sub>* of the *D<sub>sub</sub>* are also executed in reverse order at the termination and/or exit of *E<sub>sub</sub>* and/or *D<sub>sub</sub>*'s scope, recursively, according to the rules of this subclause.

If a non-local jump is used in *D*'s scope but before the execution of the *S* of *D*:

- if execution leaves *D*'s scope, *S* is not executed;
- otherwise, if control returns to a point in *E* and causes *D* to be reached more than once, the effect is the same as reaching *D* only once.

NOTE 1 The “execution” of a defer statement only enures that *S* is run on any exit from that scope. There is no observable side effect to repeat from reaching *D*, as the manifestation of any of the effects of *S* happen if and only if the scope of *D* is exited or terminated after reaching *D*, as previously specified. “Tracking” of reached defer statements at execution time is not necessary: if the non-local jump leaves the scope it is not executed (forgotten); and, if its reached again it behaves as it would during normal execution.

If a non-local jump is executed from *S* and control leaves *S*, the behavior is undefined.

If a non-local jump is executed outside of any *D* and:

- it jumps into any *S*;
- or, it jumps outside any *D*'s scope to inside that *D*'s scope;

❓ the behavior is undefined.

If *E* has any defer statements *D* that have been reached and their *S* have not yet executed, but the program is terminated or leaves the scope of *D* through any means not specified previously, including but not limited to:

- a function with the `_Noreturn` function specifier, or a function annotated with the `noreturn` or `_Noreturn` attribute, is called;
- or, any signal SIGABRT, SIGINT, or SIGTERM occurs;

then any such *S* are not run, unless otherwise specified by the implementation. Any other *D* that have not been reached do not have their *S* run.

NOTE 2 The execution of deferred statements upon non-local jumps (i.e., `longjmp` and `setjmp` described in ISO/IEC 9899:2024 §7.13) or program termination is a technique sometimes known as



“unwinding” or “stack unwinding”, and some implementations perform it. See also ISO/IEC 14882 Programming languages — C++ [except.ctor].

EXAMPLE 1 Defer statements cannot be jumped over.

```
#include <stdio.h>

int f() {
    goto target; // constraint violation
    defer { fputs(" meow", stdout); }
target:
    fputs("cat says", stdout);
    return 1;
}

int g() {
    // print "cat says" to standard output
    return fputs("cat says", stdout);
    defer { fputs(" meow", stdout); } // okay: no constraint violation,
    // not executed
}

int h() {
    goto target;
    {
        // okay: no constraint violation
        defer { fputs(" meow", stdout); }
    }
target:
    fputs("cat says", stdout);
    return 1; // prints "cat says" to standard output
}

int i() {
    {
        defer { fputs("cat says", stdout); }
        // okay: no constraint violation
        goto target;
    }
target:
    fputs(" meow", stdout);
    return 1; // prints "cat says meow" to standard output
}

int j() {
    defer {
        goto target; // constraint violation
        fputs(" meow", stdout);
    }
target:
    fputs("cat says", stdout);
    return 1;
}

int k() {
    defer {
```

```

        return 5; // constraint violation
        fputs(" meow", stdout);
    }
    fputs("cat says", stdout);
    return 1;
}

int l() {
    defer {
target:
        fputs(" meow", stdout);
    }
    goto target; // constraint violation
    fputs("cat says", stdout);
    return 1;
}

int m() {
    goto target; // okay: no constraint violation
    {
target:
        defer { fputs("cat says", stdout); }
    }
    fputs(" meow", stdout);
    return 1; // prints "cat says meow" to standard output
}

int n() {
    goto target; // constraint violation
    {
        defer { fputs(" meow", stdout); }
    }
target:
    }
    fputs("cat says", stdout);
    return 1;
}

int o() {
    {
        defer fputs("cat says", stdout);
        goto target;
    }
target:;
    fputs(" meow", stdout);
    return 1; // prints "cat says meow"
}

int p() {
    {
        goto target;
        defer fputs(" meow", stdout);
    }
target:;
    fputs("cat says", stdout);
    return 1; // prints "cat says"
}

```

```

}

int q() {
    {
        defer { fputs(" meow", stdout); }
    target:
    }
    goto target; // constraint violation
    fputs("cat says", stdout);
    return 1;
}

int r() {
    {
    target:
        defer { fputs("cat says", stdout); }
    }
    goto target; // ok
    fputs(" meow\n", stdout);
    return 1; // prints "cat says" repeatedly
}

int s() {
    {
    target:
        defer { fputs("cat says", stdout); }
        goto target; // ok
    }
    // never reached
    fputs(" meow", stdout);
    return 1; // prints "cat says" repeatedly
}

int t() {
    int count = 0;
    {
    target:
        defer { fputs("cat says ", stdout); }
        ++count;
        if (count <= 2) {
            goto target; // ok
        }
    }
    fputs("meow", stdout);
    return 1; // prints "cat says cat says cat says meow"
}

int u() {
    int count = 0;
    {
        defer { fputs("cat says", stdout); }
    target:
        if (count < 5) {
            ++count;
            goto target; // ok
        }
    }
}

```

```

    }
}
fputs(" meow", stdout);
return 1; // prints "cat says meow"
}

int v() {
    int count = 0;
target: if (count >= 2) {
        fputs("meow", stdout);
        return 1; // prints "cat says cat says meow "
    }
    defer { fputs("cat says ", stdout); }
    count++;
    goto target;
    return 0; // never reached
}

```

EXAMPLE 2 All the expressions and statements of an enclosing block are evaluated before executing defer statements, including any conversions. After all defer statements are executed, the block is then exited.

```

int main() {
    int r = 4;
    int* p = &r;
    defer { *p = 5; }
    return *p; // return 4;
}

```

❓ This is important for proper resource management in conjunction with potentially complex return expressions.

```

#include <stdlib.h>
#include <stddef.h>

int f(size_t n, void* buf) {
    /* ... */
    return 0;
}

int main() {
    const int size = 20;
    void* buf = malloc(size);
    defer { free(buf); }
    // buffer is not freed until AFTER use_buffer returns
    return use_buffer(size, buf);
}

```

❓ Conversions for the purposes of return are also computed before **defer** is entered.

```

#include <float.h>
#include <assert.h>

```

```

bool f() {
    double x = DBL_SNAN;
    defer {
        // fetestexcept(FE_INVALID) is nonzero because of the
        // comparison during the conversion to bool
        assert(fetestexcept(FE_INVALID) != 0);
    }
    return x;
}

```

EXAMPLE 3 It is not defined if defer statements execute their deferred blocks if the exiting / non-returning functions detailed previously are called.

```

#include <stdlib.h>

int f() {
    void* p = malloc(1);
    if (p == NULL) {
        return 0;
    }
    defer free(p);
    exit(1); // "p" may be leaked
    return 1;
}

int main() {
    return f();
}

```

EXAMPLE 4 Defer statements, when execution reaches them, are tied to the scope of the defer statement within their enclosing block, even if it is a secondary block without braces.

```

#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>

int main() {
    {
        defer {
            fputs(" meow", stdout);
        }
        if (true)
            defer fputs("cat", stdout);
        fputs(" says", stdout);
    }
    // "cat says meow" is printed to standard output
    exit(0);
}

```

This applies to any enclosing block, even **for** loops without braces around its body.

```

#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>

```

```

int main() {
    const char* arr[] = {"cat", "kitty", "ferocious little baby"};
    defer {
        fputs(" meow", stdout);
    }
    for (unsigned int i = 0; i < 3; ++i)
        defer printf("my %s,\n", arr[i]);
    fputs("says", stdout);

    // "my cat,
    // my kitty,
    // my ferocious little baby,
    // says meow"
    // is printed to standard output
    return 0;
}

```

EXAMPLE 5 Defer statements execute their deferred blocks in reverse order of the appearance of the defer statements, and nested defer statements execute their deferred blocks in reverse order but at the end of the deferred block they were invoked within. The following program:

```

int main() {
    int r = 0;
    {
        defer {
            defer r *= 4;
            r *= 2;
            defer {
                r += 3;
            }
        }
        defer r += 1;
    }
    return r; // return 20;
}

```

❓ is equivalent to:

```

int main() {
    int r = 0;
    r += 1;
    r *= 2;
    r += 3;
    r *= 4;
    return r; // return 20;
}

```

EXAMPLE 6 Defer statements can be executed within a switch, but a switch cannot be used to jump into the scope of a defer statement.

```
#include <stdlib.h>
```

```

int main() {
    void* p = malloc(1);
    switch (1) {
        defer free(p); // constraint violation
    default:
        defer free(p);
        break;
    }
    return 0;
}

```

EXAMPLE 7 Defer statements can not be exited by means of break or continue .

```

int main() {
    switch (1) {
    default:
        defer {
            break; // constraint violation
        }
    }
    for (;;) {
        defer {
            break; // constraint violation
        }
    }
    for (;;) {
        defer {
            continue; // constraint violation
        }
    }
    return 0;
}

```

EXAMPLE 8 Defer statements that are not reached are not executed.

```

#include <stdlib.h>

int main() {
    void* p = malloc(1);
    return 0;
    defer free(p); // not executed, p is leaked
}

```

EXAMPLE 9 Defer statements can contain other compound statements.

```

typedef struct meow *handle;

extern int purr(handle *h);
extern void un_purr(handle h);

int main() {
    handle h;


```

```

int err = purr(&h);
defer if (!err) un_purr(h);
return 0;
}

```

## 6.5. Predefined macro names

 [macro.predef]

In addition to the keywords in ISO/IEC 9899:2024 §6.10.10, an implementation shall define the following macro names:

`__STDC_DEFER_TS25755__` The integer literal 1.

## 7. Library

 [library]

The requirements from ISO/IEC 9899:2024, clause 7 apply with additional requirements in this document.

### 7.1. The `thrd_create` function

 [thrd.create]

In addition to the description and return requirements in in ISO/IEC 9899:2024 §7.28.5.1, when the `thrd_start_t` `func` parameter is returned from, it behaves as if it also runs any `defer` statements that are in scope for `func` before invoking `thrd_exit` with the returned value.


### 7.2. Defer mechanism `<stddefer.h>`

 [stddefer.hdr]

#### Recommended practice

Implementations should provide a `<stddefer.h>` header with a macro

```
defer
```

 which expands to `_Defer` in conjunction with the recommended practice in [keywords]. This can aid in portability.



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