

# JSON-ND Format Specification V1.0

JSON-ND or **JSON with Named Datatypes** is a very simple way to include data-types in [JSON](#) data.

All that is needed to encode JSON data into JSON-ND is to **appending the data-type to the element name**. So the example below:

```
{
  "name": "Alice",
  "isActive": 0,
  "amountPaid": 20
}
```

becomes:

```
{
  "name:string": "Alice",
  "isActive:boolean": 0,
  "amountPaid:currency": 20
}
```

Both forms of this JSON object are valid JSON in most, if not all, modern browser Javascript implementations.

The JSON standard [ECMA-ST-ECMA-404](#) clearly states that the name element of any JSON element is a simply a *string*, with no restrictions and that it may contain any unicode character. The original JSON post made the term **name** slightly ambiguous by using it in the text of the post, but not defining it in the accompanying McKeeman Form or Workflow diagrams.

This fact allows a very simple and efficient means to fully qualify the data-type in JSON syntax. It also provides, as a side-effect, a way to define complex types and remote methods (aka remote procedure calls).

The term "**data-type**" is completely open and it should be interpreted to mean:

***Text that describes how the associated value should be interpreted by the intended consumer.***

JSON-ND defines only three data-types **Enum**, **MixedType[]** and **Interface**. All other data-types and syntax for definitions of data-type depend on the **Language Style**.

For example, in C style languages, an integer is typically written as *int*, but in Pascal, an integer is written as *Integer*.

Any language style may be used in JSON-ND. The style being used can be included within the message or in a protocol header.

## What is the JSON-ND Specification?

The JSON-ND specification is currently a draft specification that describes the semantics required to efficiently **qualify data types for JSON elements**, to **define complex-data types** and provides a means to **define Remote Method Calls** using JSON.

Its primary purpose is to **reduce or eliminate ambiguity** of JSON values by **including type information** in the JSON string (name) and/or value.

This approach is most useful when using JSON syntax to communicate between strongly typed and untyped language implementations of a service; or with strongly typed languages using a dynamic data structure where the exact data type may not be fully known at compile time. This is also helpful for data visualisation tools when displaying novel data.

The data-type is **always** optional and may be applied to none, some, or all of the elements or array element values and typically follows a preferred language style (eg C++, C#, GO, Pascal, Typescript). The language style can be conveyed in a number of ways including pre-agreement, in the protocol header or in the data itself.

## Using JSON-ND syntax

JSON syntax defines:

- how to qualify the intended data-type for any element;
- how to define complex types; and
- the approach for defining methods that may be evoked on remote server (typically Web Service methods)

***All JSON is valid JSON-ND, and all JSON-ND MUST BE valid JSON.***

JSON-ND defines four reserved words:

- **Interface** - the keyword to indicate that the a named element is a data-type definition
- **MixedType[]** - a keyword indicating a JSON Array that elements of mixed data-type.
- **Enum** - to define enumerated types
- **Required** - to indicate that for a valid message, a particular element is required.

## Qualifying data elements

**Other methods for including typing in JSON** often use multiple JSON elements for each piece of data, eg:

```
{"name":{"type": "string", "data": "Alice"}}
```

this is moderately inefficient, typically more than doubling the message length. **JSON-ND does not use this approach.**

An alternative method is to use a pre-processing section in the message header containing the data types:

```
{"types": {"type": "string", "name": "Alice"} }
```

which is generally more efficient than the first form, when there are repeating elements. **JSON-ND does not use this approach either.**

**JSON-ND Syntax represents the same element much more simply as:**

```
{ "name:string" : "Alice" }
```

which is less verbose and, depending on the implementation, has lower memory overhead and parsing advantages over the previous two forms.

JSON-ND syntax **does NOT require elements to be qualified**, so the form:

```
{ "name":"Alice", "isActive": false, "amount:currency": 32 }
```

**is also valid JSON-ND**. Only the ambiguous *amount* element here needs qualification, the others can remain as unmodified JSON.

## Qualifying Array Elements

With JSON arrays, the data-type and array range of contained elements may be encoded in the form:

```
{ "transport:string[0,4]" : [ "car", "bus", "plane", "train" ] }
```

where the array is defined with:

- a data-type,
- an optional lower bound,
- and an optional length.

There are parsing advantages in this form over standard JSON as the length of array is known in advance and can be pre-allocated.

In order to handle JSON Arrays of mixed type, JSON-ND Syntax uses the ***MixedType[]*** reserved data-type, and encodes mixed type JSON Array values by appending the data type to **JSON value** as in the example:

```
{
  "stuff:MixedType[]" : [
    "Alice:string",
    true,
    "1:currency",
    "To be\u003A Or not to be:string"
  ]
}
```

Note that the colon in the text has been escaped to help with parsing.

The data-type qualifier is ***always*** optional, even for mixed type JSON Arrays.

## Defining Complex Data-types

With the simple convention of including the data-type in the name of an element, there is sufficient syntax to define **custom data types** and define **remote methods**.

This approach is far simpler, (but also less complete) than the [JSON Schema](#) approach because

- the data and definition are not separated
- and no prior knowledge is required by a service to use the definition.

## Enumerated types

JSON-ND defines Enumerated types as mixed type array with the reserved data-type ***Enum***. The initial index of the enumerated type can be qualified as a constant data-type. For example:

```
{
  "RoleType:Enum" : [
    "admin:1",
    "accounts",
    "sales",
    "service"
  ]
}
```

There does not seem to be a less ambiguous way to convey an enumerated type in valid JSON and be certain of not confusing it with an object type: so this is the recommended approach.

In the case where a specific language has alternative convention for defining an enumerated type that can be conveyed using legal JSON syntax, then this is not precluded.

## Complex Data-types

JSON-ND syntax defines data-types using the reserved data-type ***Interface***.

Complex types can be created utilizing primitive types (with variation depending on language style)

```
{
  "User:Interface": [
    "id:int",
    "name:string",
    "roles:RoleType[0,]"
  ]
}
```

Complex types can include other custom types. For example:

```
{
  "Order:Interface [
    "id:int",
    "orderDate:Date",
    "user:User",
    "customer:Customer"
  ]
}
```

where primitive types, the previously defined *User* object and an other (presumably defined) data-type *Customer* are used in the *Order* data-type.

There is no restriction of the use of complex types so nested objects are permitted.

## Optional and Required Data

In JSON-ND syntax, for simple or complex types, the data-type qualifier is **always optional**. This does not speak to whether an element is required for a particular service or method.

The reserved term ***required*** can be prepended to any data type using a space as delimiter, in order to inform the consumer that element should never be omitted or null.

For example it may be that a service needs the *id* element to work correctly. So the definition for the service or object can indicate that a request will be rejected if the element is missing:

```
{
  "User:Interface": [
    "id:required int",
    "name:string",
    "roles:RoleTypes[0,]"
  ]
}
```

Many languages styles support the option of non-nullable data-type: this may or may not be explicit. So how this is implemented in JSON-ND will often depend on the language style.

For example the *int* type in C# is explicitly not nullable, so when C# language style is specified, the *required* qualifier for *int* types is redundant

## Defining Methods and Remote Methods (RPCs)

Because the JSON String type has no character format restrictions, JSON-ND allows for a method call to be conveyed exactly as it is defined in the language style.

So, when defining a **method** JSON-ND allows two forms: and ***inline-method*** form and a ***method-delegate*** form.

### In-line form

For example using Pascal Style, a simple method for adding two integers could be defined as part of a complex data-type as an in-line form:

```
{
  "mathObject:Interface [
    ...,
    "function AddTwoIntegers(int1:integer; int2:integer):integer"
  ]
}
```

For C style languages, the method would be defined as:

```
{
  "mathObject:Interface [
    ...,
    "int AddTwoIntegers(int int1, int int2)"
  ]
}
```

### Method-Delegate form

The same *AddTwoIntegers* method MAY be defined using the method-delegate form and is intended to convey additional information about the method including the endpoint URI where the method is implemented.

In Pascal Style:

```
{
  "AddTwoIntegers:Interface": "function(int1:integer; int2:integer):integer",

  "mathObject:Interface": [
    ...,
    "addTwoIntegers:AddTwoIntegers" : "./methods/AddTwoIntegers"
  ]
}
```

In C Style:

```
{
  "AddTwoIntegers:Interface": "int AddTwoIntegers(int int1, int int2)",

  "mathObject:Interface": [
    ...,
    "addTwoIntegers:AddTwoIntegers" : "./methods/AddTwoIntegers"
  ]
}
```

## Defining Class Interfaces

It is possible to define ***Interfaces*** that can be implemented as *Class* depending on the consumer language.

Many languages support Classes including Javascript as of [ES6](#).

Take the Typescript definition below:

```
class Vendor {
  name: string;

  constructor(name: string) {
    this.name = name;
  }

  greet() {
    return "Hello, welcome to " + this.name;
  }
}
```

This can easily be represented as an interface in JSON-ND as:

```
{
  "Vendor:Interface" : [
    "constructor(name: string):Vendor",
    "greet():void"
  ]
}
```

In JSON-ND, *Class* definitions are technical possibility: it would require the implementation of methods to be included in the definition. This is an extreme security risk.

**Implementations SHOULD NOT be included in definitions** because it is extremely difficult to prevent arbitrary

(potentially malicious) code from being executed in the consumer application. Scripting languages are particularly vulnerable (eg dynamic SQL and the `exec` command in javascript). The inclusion of implementations for compiled languages might encourage developers to include dynamic execution methods in their applications also making them vulnerable.

## Conveying Language Style and error handling

Data consumers need to be certain of the message syntax (either JSON-ND or JSON) to ensure the data is correctly interpreted.

*The specification* defines 3 qualifiers for indicating the message type.

1. "version" indicating the version of JSON-ND specification ("1.0")
2. "style" conveys the context of data-types and method syntax (eg "xs", "c++", "pascal", "c#")
3. "strict" indicator for error handling purposes.

These indicators can be conveyed to the data consumer in any way. For example:

- out of bounds : A pre-agreement where JSON-ND version, style and strictness have been coded into the application by design
- by using a protocol specific metadata exchange (eg HTTP Content-type)
- by including a JSON-ND object within the message.

The official MIME-Type `application/json-nd` with the parameters "version", "style" and "strict". This mime-type registered with IANA.

## Scoping JSON-ND using the JSON Object

The Scope of a language style may be restricted using then JSON-ND object.

The JSON-ND object is defined as:

```
"Json-ND" :{
  "version": 1.0,
  "style": "<language>",
  [,"strict": true|false]
  [, "data":{}]
```

This allows a single message to include multiple versions of the definition or data to be included in a single message.

```
{
  "Json-ND" :{
    "version": 1.0,
    "style": "pascal",
    "data":{
      "Vendor:Interface" : [
        "constructor Create(name: string)",
        "procedure greet"
      ]
    }
  },
  "Json-ND" :{
```

```

"version": 1.0,
"style": "C#",
"strict": true,
data:{
  "Vendor:Interface" : [
    "Vendor(string name)",
    "void greet()"
  ]
}
}

```

The only allowed value of **version** is currently "1.0".

The **style** property is a string value that indicates a programming language or specification where data-types and/or method syntax are defined. Any string may be used here to sufficiently disambiguate all data-types and method syntax used within the message.

The **strict** property indicates that non-conformant messages should be rejected. Where the strict property is not used (or set to false) then no error message should be generated by the parsing process, however it may be that a method may still fail during processing.

## Error handling (**strict** indicator)

The introduction of typing in JSON-ND introduces the need for error handling because there is a potential for data to be incompatible with the definition.

The default action when parsing JSON-ND syntax for unknown properties, non-conformant values, or misalignment of range bounds in Arrays is to **ignore data and adhere the specified type**. For example: the following non-conformant message:

```

{"name:string": true, "items:integer[0,2]" : "[3,2.5,7]" }

```

should be interpreted as:

```

{"name:string": null, "items:integer[0,2]" : "[3,<default||null>]" }

```

and the consumer should attempt to use the interpreted data as supplied.

When the JSON-ND "strict" qualifier is used (either unqualified or set to "true") then the entire message transaction should be rejected as an error.

For Example using a Scoped JSON-ND Object:

```

"Json-ND" :{
  "version": 1.0,
  "style": "pascal",
  "strict": true,
  "data":{
    "id:required integer": null,
    "age:integer": "old",
  }
}

```



should result in an exception being raised and error handling to be evoked. This applies equally an entire message using the JSON-ND mime-type, for example in the http request:

```
GET /api/user HTTP/1.1
Content-Type: application/json-nd; version=1.0; style="pascal"; strict

{
  "id:required integer": null,
  "age:integer": "old"
}
```

The receiving server should reject the message as a `400 Bad Request` as the required identifier "id" is not supplied and the integer element "age" is not an integer.

## Guidelines for using JSON-ND Syntax

1. All JSON is valid JSON-ND, and all JSON-ND **MUST BE** valid JSON.
2. To translate JSON to JSON-ND, for JSON Object, JSON Object Elements and named JSoN Arrays, (optionally) **append the data-type to the end of the element name or value prefixed by a colon.**
3. For named arrays, **the data-type and array range are appended to the name prefixed by a colon.** The array *lower bound* and *range* are optional.
4. The term **"data-type"** is completely open and it should be interpreted to mean: `Text that describes how the associated value should be interpreted by the intended consumer.`
5. The data-type is **always** optional and may be applied to none, some, or all of the elements or array element values.
6. For *all* JSoN Arrays, the data-type may be encoded in the JSON value by **converting the value to a string, and then appending the data type prefixed by a colon.** It is recommended that this approach be used *ONLY* when:
  1. the array contains data elements of mixed type; or
  2. when the array is un-named.
7. Encoding the data-type in the value is allowed in named arrays, but NOT allowed when the data-type has not been supplied in the element name.
8. In the case where the JSON Array element is a string containing one or more colons, the standard JSON Unicode escape `\u003A` should be applied, otherwise the data-type is **assumed to be the text following the final colon.**
9. For specific languages, the COLON (unicode 003A) forms part of the method definition. An exception to the rule above may be required when defining methods.
10. In order to qualify how to correctly interpret the data-type, an optional language style can be specified in the form of a [JSON-ND object](#) within the message OR by using the JSON-ND mime-type

*application/json-nd* in the protocol metadata.

11.

In cases where there is no pre-arranged style,

12.

the style qualifier may be added as an additional element.

13.

A fully qualified JSON-ND Object may also be used: eg

```
{
  "Json-ND": {"version": 1.0,"style": "pascal"}
  "id:UInt32": 345,
  "name:string": "Bob",
  "cost:currency": 1400
}
```

```
{
  "Json-ND": {
    "version": 1.0,
    "style": "pascal",
    "data": {
      "id:UInt32": 345,
      "name:string": "Bob",
      "cost:currency": 1400
    }
  }
}
```

12. In the case where the intended consumers of a message are not known (eg. public APIs), multiple consumer language versions of the definition may be generated for each of the likely implementations of the definition (eg C++, C#, Pascal, Go, Haskell). Additionally a "default" language such as [XSD Built-in Types](#) is recommended for public apis

```
"Json-ND" :{
  "version": 1.0,
  "style": "http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-datatypes"
}
```

13.

Remote method calls can be defined using the syntax of the Language Style. There are two forms

1. [In-line](#); or
2. using [Method-Delegate](#) approach.

14.

A complex data-type can be used to define an Class Interface in JSON-ND.

15.

Technically a Class definition could be encoded in JSON-ND, however the inclusion of **method implementations** in JSON-ND messages *is strongly discouraged*.

## Example Javascript JSON-ND Validation

Below is a very simple JSON-ND parser/validator. [raw source](#)

<html>

```

<head>
  <title>JSON-ND Example Parse - Javascript</title>
</script>
  const JSONND =
  {
    Parse : function(ndObj, strict)
  {
    var failed = false;
    var failedMessage= "";
    var obj = JSON.parse(ndObj);
    for (var propertyName in obj) {
      var p = propertyName.indexOf(":");
      var v = obj[propertyName];
      if (p > 0) {
        //specific check for <Big>int (not number) ECMAScript 202
        if (propertyName.substr(p+1,3)=='int')
        {
          var nv=parseInt(v); // it will truncate floats,
          if (strict)
          {
            if (!nv || (parseFloat(v)-nv!=0) )
            {
              failedMessage += "'"+propertyName+" value <'+v+'> not valid;";
              failed=true;
              v=null;
            }
          }
          else {
            v=nv;
          }
          // add more validation.
          obj[propertyName.substr(0, p)] = v;
          delete(obj[propertyName]);
        }
      }
      if (failed) throw failedMessage;
    }
    return obj;
  }
};

</script>
</head>
<body>
  <script>
    var nd = '{"abc:string":"abc contains a string", "def:integer" : "not a number"}';
    document.write("<h3>Original 'nd' object:<pre>",nd,"<pre></h3>");
    document.write("See that 'nd.abc' has no value: abc=<b>" ,nd.abc,"</b>");
    document.write("<h3>Then validate with JSON_ND_Parse:<pre>",JSON.stringify(JSONND.Parse(
    document.write("<p style='color: red'>Note that 'def' failed validation</p>");

  document.write("<h3>With <b>strict</b> operator in place:");
  try
  {
    var strictNd = '{"abc:string":"abc contains a string", "def:integer" : "20.5"}';
    document.write("<pre>",JSON.stringify(JSONND.Parse(strictNd,true)),"</pre>");
  } catch (e)
  {
    document.write("<br>Caught exception: <pre>",e,"</pre>");
  }
  </script>
</body>
</html>

```

[demo](#)