

CommonMark

A strongly defined, highly compatible specification of Markdown

What is Markdown?

It's a plain text format for writing structured documents, based on formatting conventions from email and usenet.

[Learn Markdown in 60 Seconds](#)

Who created Markdown?

It was [developed in 2004 by John Gruber in collaboration with Aaron Swartz](#). Gruber wrote the first markdown-to-html converter in Perl, and it soon became widely used in websites. By 2014 there were dozens of implementations in many languages.

Why is CommonMark needed?

John Gruber's [canonical description of Markdown's syntax](#) does not specify the syntax unambiguously.

In the absence of a spec, early implementers consulted the original `Markdown.pl` code to resolve these ambiguities. But `Markdown.pl` was quite buggy, and gave manifestly bad results in many cases, so it was not a satisfactory replacement for a spec. `Markdown.pl` was last updated December 17th, 2004.

Because there is no unambiguous spec, implementations have diverged considerably over the last 10 years. As a result, users are often surprised to find that a document that renders one way on one system (say, a GitHub wiki) renders differently on another (say, converting to docbook using Pandoc). To make matters worse, because nothing in Markdown counts as a "syntax error," the divergence often isn't discovered right away.

There's no standard test suite for Markdown; [MDTest](#) is the closest thing we have. The only way to resolve Markdown ambiguities and inconsistencies is [Babelmark](#), which compares the output of 20+ implementations of Markdown against each other to see if a consensus emerges.

We propose a **standard, unambiguous syntax specification for Markdown**, along with a **suite of comprehensive tests** to validate Markdown implementations against this specification. We believe this is necessary, even essential, for the future of Markdown.

That's what we call **CommonMark**. 

Who are you?

We're a group of Markdown fans who either work at companies with industrial scale deployments of Markdown, have written Markdown parsers, have extensive experience supporting Markdown with end users – or all of the above.

- **John MacFarlane**, jgm@berkeley.edu
- **David Greenspan**, david@meteor.com
- **Vicent Marti**, vicent@github.com
- **Neil Williams**, neil@reddit.com
- **Benjamin Dumke-von der Ehe**, ben@stackexchange.com
- **Jeff Atwood**, jatwood@codinghorror.com

How can I help?

Exercise our [reference implementations](#), or [find a community implementation](#) in your preferred environment or language. Provide feedback!

If a CommonMark implementation does not already exist in your preferred environment or language, try **implementing your own CommonMark parser**. One of our major goals is to [strongly specify Markdown](#), and to eliminate the many old inconsistencies and ambiguities that made using Markdown so difficult. Did we succeed?

Where can I find it?

[spec.commonmark.org](#)

The CommonMark specification.

[code.commonmark.org](#)

Reference implementation and validation test suite on GitHub.

[talk.commonmark.org](#)

Public discussion area and mailing list via [Discourse](#).

[commonmark.org/help](#)

Quick reference card and interactive tutorial for learning Markdown.

[spec.commonmark.org/dingus/](#)

Live testing tool powered by the reference implementation.

When is the spec final?

The current version of the CommonMark spec is complete, and quite robust after a year of public feedback ... but not quite final.

With your help, we plan to announce a finalized 1.0 spec and test suite in 2019.

