

## Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels

### Status of this Memo

This document specifies an Internet Best Current Practices for the Internet Community, and requests discussion and suggestions for improvements. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

### Abstract

In many standards track documents several words are used to signify the requirements in the specification. These words are often capitalized. This document defines these words as they should be interpreted in IETF documents. Authors who follow these guidelines should incorporate this phrase near the beginning of their document:

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in RFC 2119.

Note that the force of these words is modified by the requirement level of the document in which they are used.

1. **MUST** This word, or the terms "REQUIRED" or "SHALL", mean that the definition is an absolute requirement of the specification.
2. **MUST NOT** This phrase, or the phrase "SHALL NOT", mean that the definition is an absolute prohibition of the specification.
3. **SHOULD** This word, or the adjective "RECOMMENDED", mean that there may exist valid reasons in particular circumstances to ignore a particular item, but the full implications must be understood and carefully weighed before choosing a different course.
4. **SHOULD NOT** This phrase, or the phrase "NOT RECOMMENDED" mean that there may exist valid reasons in particular circumstances when the particular behavior is acceptable or even useful, but the full implications should be understood and the case carefully weighed before implementing any behavior described with this label.