

Sequence Alignment/Map Optional Fields Specification

The SAM/BAM Format Specification Working Group

16 Feb 2025

The master version of this document can be found at <https://github.com/samtools/hts-specs>.

This printing is version flf5f1b from that repository, last modified on the date shown above.

This document is a companion to the *Sequence Alignment/Map Format Specification* that defines the SAM and BAM formats, and to the *CRAM Format Specification* that defines the CRAM format.¹ Alignment records in each of these formats may contain a number of optional fields, each labelled with a *tag* identifying that field's data. This document describes each of the predefined standard tags, and discusses conventions around creating new tags.

1 Standard tags

Predefined standard tags are listed in the following table and described in greater detail in later subsections. Optional fields are usually displayed as **TAG:TYPE:VALUE**; the *type* may be one of **A** (character), **B** (general array), **f** (real number), **H** (hexadecimal array), **i** (integer), or **Z** (string).

Tag	Type	Description
AM	i	The smallest template-independent mapping quality in the template
AS	i	Alignment score generated by aligner
BC	Z	Barcode sequence identifying the sample
BQ	Z	Offset to base alignment quality (BAQ)
BZ	Z	Phred quality of the unique molecular barcode bases in the OX tag
CB	Z	Cell identifier
CC	Z	Reference name of the next hit
CG	B,I	BAM only: CIGAR in BAM's binary encoding if (and only if) it consists of >65535 operators
CM	i	Edit distance between the color sequence and the color reference (see also NM)
CO	Z	Free-text comments
CP	i	Leftmost coordinate of the next hit
CQ	Z	Color read base qualities
CR	Z	Cellular barcode sequence bases (uncorrected)
CS	Z	Color read sequence
CT	Z	Complete read annotation tag, used for consensus annotation dummy features
CY	Z	Phred quality of the cellular barcode sequence in the CR tag
<u>DI</u>	<u>Z</u>	<u>Duplicate Identity, for identifying the queryname that this read is a duplicate of</u>
<u>DS</u>	<u>i</u>	<u>Duplicate-set Size containing the size of the duplicate set</u>
<u>DT</u>	<u>Z</u>	<u>Duplicate type, used to identifying duplicate reads as coming from the library-construction (LB) or sequencing (SQ)</u>
E2	Z	The 2nd most likely base calls
FI	i	The index of segment in the template

¹See **SAMv1.pdf** and **CRAMv3.pdf** at <https://github.com/samtools/hts-specs>.

BQ:Z:qualities Offset to base alignment quality (BAQ), of the same length as the read sequence. At the i -th read base, $BAQ_i = Q_i - (BQ_i - 64)$ where Q_i is the i -th base quality.

CC:Z:rname Reference name of the next hit; '=' for the same chromosome.

CG:B:I,encodedCigar Real CIGAR in its binary form if (and only if) it contains >65535 operations. This is a BAM file only tag as a workaround of BAM's incapability to store long CIGARs in the standard way. SAM and CRAM files created with updated tools aware of the workaround are not expected to contain this tag. See also the footnote in Section 4.2 of the SAM spec for details.[th](#)

CP:i:pos Leftmost coordinate of the next hit.[~](#)

[DS:i :count](#) [Size of the duplicate set that the template is part of.](#)

E2:Z:bases The 2nd most likely base calls. Same encoding and same length as SEQ. See also U2 for associated quality values.

FI:i:int The index of segment in the template.

FS:Z:str Segment suffix.

H0:i:count Number of perfect hits.

H1:i:count Number of 1-difference hits (see also NM).

H2:i:count Number of 2-difference hits.

HI:i:i Query hit index, indicating the alignment record is the i -th one stored in SAM.

IH:i:count Number of alignments stored in the file that contain the query in the current record.

MC:Z:cigar CIGAR string for mate/next segment.

MD:Z:[0-9]+(([A-Z] | \^[A-Z]+) [0-9]+)*

String encoding mismatched and deleted reference bases, used in conjunction with the CIGAR and SEQ fields to reconstruct the bases of the reference sequence interval to which the alignment has been mapped. This can enable variant calling without requiring access to the entire original reference.

The MD string consists of the following items, concatenated without additional delimiter characters:

- [0-9]+, indicating a run of reference bases that are identical to the corresponding SEQ bases;
- [A-Z], identifying a single reference base that differs from the SEQ base aligned at that position;
- \^[A-Z]+, identifying a run of reference bases that have been deleted in the alignment.

As shown in the complete regular expression above, numbers alternate with the other items. Thus if two mismatches or deletions are adjacent without a run of identical bases between them, a '0' (indicating a 0-length run) must be used to separate them in the MD string.

Clipping, padding, reference skips, and insertions ('H', 'S', 'P', 'N', and 'I' CIGAR operations) are not represented in the MD string. When reconstructing the reference sequence, inserted and soft-clipped SEQ bases are omitted as determined by tracking 'I' and 'S' operations in the CIGAR string. (If the CIGAR string contains 'N' operations, then the corresponding skipped parts of the reference sequence cannot be reconstructed.)

For example, a string '10A5^AC6' means from the leftmost reference base in the alignment, there are 10 matches followed by an A on the reference which is different from the aligned read base; the next 5 reference bases are matches followed by a 2bp deletion from the reference; the deleted sequence is AC; the last 6 bases are matches.

MQ:i:score Mapping quality of the mate/next segment.

NH:i:count Number of reported alignments that contain the query in the current record.