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BSD is both a license and a class of license (generally referred to as BSD-like). The modified BSD license (in wide use today) is very similar to the license originally used for the BSD version of [Unix](#). The BSD license is a simple license that merely requires that all code retain the BSD license notice if redistributed in source code format, or reproduce the notice if redistributed in binary format. The BSD license (unlike some other licenses e.g. [GPL](#)) does not require that source code be distributed at all.

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Terms

In addition to the original (4-clause) license used for BSD, several derivative licenses have emerged that are also commonly referred to as a "BSD license". Today, the typical BSD license is the 3-clause version, which is revised from the original 4-clause version.

In all BSD licenses as following, <year> is the year of the copyright. As published in BSD, <copyright holder> is "Regents of the University of California".

Previous license

Some releases of BSD prior to the adoption of the 4-clause BSD license used a license that is clearly ancestral to the 4-clause BSD license. These releases include some parts of 4.3BSD-Tahoe (1988), about 1000 files,^[2] and Net/1 (1989). Although largely replaced by the 4-clause license, this license can be found in 4.3BSD-Reno, Net/2, and 4.4BSD-Alpha.

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4-clause license (original "BSD License")

The original BSD license contained a clause not found in later licenses, known as the "advertising clause". This clause eventually became controversial, as it required authors of all works deriving from a BSD-licensed work to include an acknowledgment of the original source in all advertising material. This was clause number 3 in the original license text:^[6]

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1. Redistributions of source code must retain the above copyright notice, this list of conditions and the following disclaimer.

Prior BSD License

Author	<u>Regents of the University of California</u>
Publisher	<u>Public Domain</u>
Published	1988
SPDX identifier	<u>N/A (see list^[1])</u>
Debian FSG compatible	Yes
OSI approved	No
GPL compatible	No
Copyleft	No
Linking from code with a different licence	Yes

BSD License

Author	<u>Regents of the University of California</u>
Publisher	<u>Public Domain</u>
Published	1990
SPDX identifier	<u>BSD-4-Clause (see list for more^[1])</u>
Debian FSG compatible	Yes ^[3]
FSF approved	Yes ^[4]
OSI approved	No ^[5]
GPL compatible	No ^[4]

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<u>Copyleft</u>	No ^[4]
<u>Linking from code with a different licence</u>	Yes

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[6]

This clause was objected to on the grounds that as people changed the license to reflect their name or organization it led to escalating advertising requirements when programs were combined in a software distribution: every occurrence of the license with a different name required a separate acknowledgment. In arguing against it, Richard Stallman has stated that he counted 75 such acknowledgments in a 1997 version of NetBSD.^[7] In addition, the clause presented a legal problem for those wishing to publish BSD-licensed software which relies upon separate programs using the GNU GPL: the advertising clause is incompatible with the GPL, which does not allow the addition of restrictions beyond those it already imposes; because of this, the GPL's publisher, the Free Software Foundation, recommends developers not use the license, though it states there is no reason not to use software already using it.^[4]

Today, this original license is now sometimes called "*BSD-old*" or "*4-clause BSD*".

3-clause license ("BSD License 2.0", "Revised BSD License", "New BSD License", or "Modified BSD License")

The advertising clause was removed from the license text in the official BSD on 22 July 1999 by William Hoskins, Director of the Office of Technology Licensing for UC Berkeley.^{[6][9][10]} Other BSD distributions removed the clause, but many similar clauses remain in BSD-derived code from other sources, and unrelated code using a derived license.

While the original license is sometimes referred to as the "**BSD-old**", the resulting 3-clause version is sometimes referred to by "**BSD-new**." Other names include "New BSD", "revised BSD", "BSD-3", or "3-clause BSD". This version has been vetted as an Open source license by the OSI as "The BSD License".^[5] The Free Software Foundation, which refers to the license as the "Modified BSD License", states that it is compatible with the GNU GPL. The FSF encourages users to be specific when referring to the license by name (i.e. not simply referring to it as "a BSD license" or "BSD-style") to avoid confusion with the original BSD license.^[8]

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New BSD License

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<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Public Domain</u>
<u>Published</u>	22 July 1999 ^[6]
<u>SPDX identifier</u>	BSD-3-Clause (see list for more ^[1])
<u>Debian FSG compatible</u>	Yes ^[3]
<u>FSF approved</u>	Yes ^[8]
<u>OSI approved</u>	Yes ^[5]
<u>GPL compatible</u>	Yes ^[8]
<u>Copyleft</u>	No ^[8]
<u>Linking from code with a different licence</u>	Yes

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2-clause license ("Simplified BSD License" or "FreeBSD License")

An even more simplified version has come into use, primarily known for its usage in [FreeBSD](#).^[12] It was in use there as early as 29 April 1999^[13] and likely well before. The primary difference between it and the New BSD (3-clause) License is that it omits the non-endorsement clause. The FreeBSD version of the license also adds a further disclaimer about views and opinions expressed in the software,^[14] though this is not commonly included by other projects.

The Free Software Foundation, which refers to the license as the FreeBSD License, states that it is compatible with the GNU GPL. In addition, the FSF encourages users to be specific when referring to the license by name (i.e. not simply referring to it as "a BSD license" or "BSD-style"), as it does with the modified/new BSD license, to avoid confusion with the original BSD license.^[11]

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FreeBSD License

	
Author	The FreeBSD Project
<u>Publisher</u>	The FreeBSD Project
Published	April 1999 or earlier
<u>SPDX identifier</u>	BSD-2-Clause (see list for more ^[1])
<u>Debian FSG compatible</u>	Yes
<u>FSF approved</u>	Yes ^[11]
<u>OSI approved</u>	Yes ^[5]
<u>GPL compatible</u>	Yes ^[11]
<u>Copyleft</u>	No ^[11]
<u>Linking from</u>	Yes

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Other projects, such as NetBSD, use a similar 2-clause license.^[15] This version has been vetted as an Open source license by the OSI as the "Simplified BSD License."^[5]

The ISC license is functionally equivalent, and endorsed by the OpenBSD project as a license template for new contributions.^[16]

0-clause license ("BSD Zero Clause License")

The BSD 0-clause license goes further than the 2-clause license by dropping the requirements to include the copyright notice, license text, or disclaimer in either source or binary forms. Doing so forms a public-domain-equivalent license,^[18] the same way as MIT No Attribution License. It is known as "0BSD", "Zero-Clause BSD", or "Free Public License 1.0.0".^{[19][20]} It was first used by Rob Landley in Toybox.

Copyright (C) [year] by [copyright holder] <[email]>

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<u>Author</u>	Rob Landley
<u>Published</u>	2006
<u>SPDX identifier</u>	0BSD
<u>Debian FSG compatible</u>	Yes
<u>FSF approved</u>	?
<u>OSI approved</u>	Yes ^[17]
<u>GPL compatible</u>	Yes
<u>Copyleft</u>	No
<u>Linking from</u>	Yes

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code with a
different
licence

Other variations

The SPDX License List contains extra BSD license variations. Examples include:^[1]

- BSD-1-Clause, a license with only the source code retaining clause.
- BSD-2-Clause-Patent, a variation of BSD-2-Clause with a patent grant.
- BSD-3-Clause-No-Nuclear-Warranty, a variation of BSD-3-Clause that adds a disclaimer that a piece of software is not designed for use in a nuclear facility.

License compatibility

Commercial license compatibility

The FreeBSD project argues on the advantages of BSD-style licenses for companies and commercial use-cases due to their license compatibility with proprietary licenses and general flexibility, stating that the BSD-style licenses place only "*minimal restrictions on future behavior*" and are not "*legal time-bombs*", unlike copyleft licenses.^[21] The BSD License allows proprietary use and allows the software released under the license to be incorporated into proprietary products. Works based on the material may be released under a proprietary license as closed source software, allowing usual commercial usages under them.

FOSS compatibility

The 3-clause BSD license, like most permissive licenses, is compatible with almost all FOSS licenses (and as well proprietary licenses).^{[22][23]}

Two variants of the license, the New BSD License/Modified BSD License (3-clause),^[8] and the Simplified BSD License/FreeBSD License (2-clause)^[11] have been verified as GPL-compatible free software licenses by the Free Software Foundation, and have been vetted as open source licenses by the Open Source Initiative.^[5] The original, 4-clause BSD license has not been accepted as an open source license and, although the original is considered to be a free software license by the FSF, the FSF does not consider it to be compatible with the GPL due to the advertising clause.^[4]

Reception and usage

The BSD license family is one of the oldest and most broadly used license families in the Free and open-source software ecosystem. Also, many new licenses were derived or inspired by the BSD licenses. Many FOSS software projects use a BSD license, for instance the BSD OS family (FreeBSD etc.), Google's Bionic or Toybox. As of 2015 the BSD 3-clause license ranked in popularity number five according to Black Duck Software^[25] and sixth according to GitHub data.^[26]

Over the years I've become convinced that the BSD license is great for code you don't care about. I'll use it myself.

-- Linus Torvalds at LinuxCon 2016^[24]

See also

- Comparison of free and open-source software licenses
- Software using the BSD license (category)

References

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20. "Zero-Clause BSD / Free Public License 1.0.0 (0BSD)" (<https://opensource.org/licenses/0BSD>). *opensource.org*. Retrieved 19 February 2021.
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22. Hanwell, Marcus D. (28 January 2014). "Should I use a permissive license? Copyleft? Or something in the middle?" (<http://opensource.com/business/14/1/what-license-should-i-use-open-source-project>). *opensource.com*. Retrieved 30 May 2015. *"Permissive licensing simplifies things One reason the business world, and more and more developers [...], favor permissive licenses is in the simplicity of reuse. The license usually only pertains to the source code that is licensed and makes no attempt to infer any conditions upon any other component, and because of this there is no need to define what constitutes a derived work. I have also never seen a license compatibility chart for permissive licenses; it seems that they are all compatible."*

23. "Licence Compatibility and Interoperability" (https://web.archive.org/web/20150617130550/https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/software/page/licence_compatibility_and_interoperability). *Open-Source Software – Develop, share, and reuse open source software for public administrations*. joinup.ec.europa.eu. Archived from the original (https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/software/page/licence_compatibility_and_interoperability) on 17 June 2015. Retrieved 30 May 2015. *"The licences for distributing free or open source software (FOSS) are divided in two families: permissive and copyleft. Permissive licences (BSD, MIT, X11, Apache, Zope) are generally compatible and interoperable with most other licences, tolerating to merge, combine or improve the covered code and to re-distribute it under many licences (including non-free or "proprietary")."*
24. Torvalds at LinuxCon Part III: Permissive Licenses and Org Charts (<https://fossforce.com/2016/09/torvalds-linuxcon-permissive-licenses-org-charts/>) FOSS Force, 2016
25. "Top 20 licenses" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160719043600/https://www.blackducksoftware.com/top-open-source-licenses>). Black Duck Software. 19 November 2015. Archived from the original (<http://www.blackducksoftware.com/resources/data/top-20-licenses>) on 19 July 2016. Retrieved 19 November 2015. *"1. MIT license 24%, 2. GNU General Public License (GPL) 2.0 23%, 3. Apache License 16%, 4. GNU General Public License (GPL) 3.0 9%, 5. BSD License 2.0 (3-clause, New or Revised) License 6%, 6. GNU Lesser General Public License (LGPL) 2.1 5%, 7. Artistic License (Perl) 4%, 8. GNU Lesser General Public License (LGPL) 3.0 2%, 9. Microsoft Public License 2%, 10. Eclipse Public License (EPL) 2%"*
26. Balter, Ben (9 March 2015). "Open source license usage on GitHub.com" (<https://github.com/blog/1964-license-usage-on-github-com>). github.com. Retrieved 21 November 2015. *"1 MIT 44.69%, 2 Other 15.68%, 3 GPLv2 12.96%, 4 Apache 11.19%, 5 GPLv3 8.88%, 6 BSD 3-clause 4.53%, 7 Unlicense 1.87%, 8 BSD 2-clause 1.70%, 9 LGPLv3 1.30%, 10 AGPLv3 1.05%"*

External links

- *Twenty Years of Berkeley Unix: From AT&T-Owned to Freely Redistributable* (<http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/opensources/book/kirkmck.html>), Marshall Kirk McKusick, in: *Open Sources: Voices from the Open Source Revolution*, O'Reilly 1999
 - The Amazing Disappearing BSD License (https://urchin.earth.li/~twic/The_Amazing_Disappearing_BSD_License.html)
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