

**diff.info**

**COLLABORATORS**

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# Chapter 1

## diff.info

### 1.1 diff.info

This file documents the the GNU diff, diff3, sdiff, and cmp ↵  
commands  
for showing the differences between text files and the patch command  
for using their output to update files.

This is Edition 1.2, for diff 2.4 and patch 2.1.

#### Overview

Preliminary information.

#### Comparison

What file comparison means.

#### Output Formats

Formats for difference reports.

#### Comparing Directories

Comparing files and directories.

#### Adjusting Output

Making diff output prettier.

#### diff Performance

Making diff smarter or faster.

#### Comparing Three Files

Formats for three-way difference reports.

#### diff3 Merging

Merging from a common ancestor.

#### Interactive Merging

Interactive merging with sdiff.

#### Merging with patch

Using patch to change old files into new ones.

#### Making Patches

Tips for making patch distributions.

#### Invoking cmp

How to run cmp and a summary of its options.

#### Invoking diff

How to run diff and a summary of its options.

#### Invoking diff3

How to run diff3 and a summary of its options.

#### Invoking patch

How to run patch and a summary of its options.

#### Invoking sdiff

How to run sdiff and a summary of its options.

#### Incomplete Lines

Lines that lack trailing newlines.

#### Projects

If you think you've found a bug or other shortcoming.

#### Concept Index

Index of concepts.

## 1.2 diff.info/Overview

### Overview

\*\*\*\*\*

Computer users often find occasion to ask how two files differ. Perhaps one file is a newer version of the other file. Or maybe the two files started out as identical copies but were changed by different people.

You can use the diff command to show differences between two files, or each corresponding file in two directories. diff outputs differences between files line by line in any of several formats, selectable by command line options. This set of differences is often called a diff or patch. For files that are identical, diff normally produces no output; for binary (non-text) files, diff normally reports only that they are different.

You can use the cmp command to show the offsets and line numbers where two files differ. cmp can also show all the characters that

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differ between the two files, side by side. Another way to compare two files character by character is the Emacs command M-x compare-windows. See Other Window, for more information on that command.

You can use the diff3 command to show differences among three files. When two people have made independent changes to a common original, diff3 can report the differences between the original and the two changed versions, and can produce a merged file that contains both persons' changes together with warnings about conflicts.

You can use the sdiff command to merge two files interactively.

You can use the set of differences produced by diff to distribute updates to text files (such as program source code) to other people. This method is especially useful when the differences are small compared to the complete files. Given diff output, you can use the patch program to update, or patch, a copy of the file. If you think of diff as subtracting one file from another to produce their difference, you can think of patch as adding the difference to one file to reproduce the other.

This manual first concentrates on making diffs, and later shows how to use diffs to update files.

GNU diff was written by Mike Haertel, David Hayes, Richard Stallman, Len Tower, and Paul Eggert. Wayne Davison designed and implemented the unified output format. The basic algorithm is described in "An O(N<sup>2</sup>) Difference Algorithm and its Variations", Eugene W. Myers, 'Algorithmica' Vol. 1 No. 2, 1986, pp. 251-266; and in "A File Comparison Program", Webb Miller and Eugene W. Myers, 'Software--Practice and Experience' Vol. 15 No. 11, 1985, pp. 1025-1040. The algorithm was independently discovered as described in "Algorithms for Approximate String Matching", E. Ukkonen, 'Information and Control' Vol. 64, 1985, pp. 100-118.

GNU diff3 was written by Randy Smith. GNU sdiff was written by Thomas Lord. GNU cmp was written by Torbjorn Granlund and David MacKenzie.

patch was written mainly by Larry Wall; the GNU enhancements were written mainly by Wayne Davison and David MacKenzie. Parts of this manual are adapted from a manual page written by Larry Wall, with his permission.

## 1.3 diff.info/Comparison

### What Comparison Means

\*\*\*\*\*

There are several ways to think about the differences between two files. One way to think of the differences is as a series of lines that were deleted from, inserted in, or changed in one file to produce the other file. diff compares two files line by line, finds groups of lines that differ, and reports each group of differing lines. It can

---



report the differing lines in several formats, which have different purposes.

GNU diff can show whether files are different without detailing the differences. It also provides ways to suppress certain kinds of differences that are not important to you. Most commonly, such differences are changes in the amount of white space between words or lines. diff also provides ways to suppress differences in alphabetic case or in lines that match a regular expression that you provide. These options can accumulate; for example, you can ignore changes in both white space and alphabetic case.

Another way to think of the differences between two files is as a sequence of pairs of characters that can be either identical or different. cmp reports the differences between two files character by character, instead of line by line. As a result, it is more useful than diff for comparing binary files. For text files, cmp is useful mainly when you want to know only whether two files are identical.

To illustrate the effect that considering changes character by character can have compared with considering them line by line, think of what happens if a single newline character is added to the beginning of a file. If that file is then compared with an otherwise identical file that lacks the newline at the beginning, diff will report that a blank line has been added to the file, while cmp will report that almost every character of the two files differs.

diff3 normally compares three input files line by line, finds groups of lines that differ, and reports each group of differing lines. Its output is designed to make it easy to inspect two different sets of changes to the same file.

#### Hunks

Groups of differing lines.

#### White Space

Suppressing differences in white space.

#### Blank Lines

Suppressing differences in blank lines.

#### Case Folding

Suppressing differences in alphabetic case.

#### Specified Folding

Suppressing differences that match regular expressions.

#### Brief

Summarizing which files are different.

#### Binary

Comparing binary files or forcing text comparisons.

## 1.4 diff.info/Hunks

Hunks

=====

When comparing two files, `diff` finds sequences of lines common to both files, interspersed with groups of differing lines called hunks. Comparing two identical files yields one sequence of common lines and no hunks, because no lines differ. Comparing two entirely different files yields no common lines and one large hunk that contains all lines of both files. In general, there are many ways to match up lines between two given files. `diff` tries to minimize the total hunk size by finding large sequences of common lines interspersed with small hunks of differing lines.

For example, suppose the file `F` contains the three lines `a`, `b`, `c`, and the file `G` contains the same three lines in reverse order `c`, `b`, `a`. If `diff` finds the line `c` as common, then the command `diff F G` produces this output:

```
1,2d0
< a
< b
3a2,3
> b
> a
```

But if `diff` notices the common line `b` instead, it produces this output:

```
1c1
< a
---
> c
3c3
< c
---
> a
```

It is also possible to find `a` as the common line. `diff` does not always find an optimal matching between the files; it takes shortcuts to run faster. But its output is usually close to the shortest possible. You can adjust this tradeoff with the `-minimal` option (see

```
diff Performance
).
```

## 1.5 diff.info/White Space

Suppressing Differences in Blank and Tab Spacing

=====

The `-b` and `-ignore-space-change` options ignore white space at line

end, and considers all other sequences of one or more white space characters to be equivalent. With these options, diff considers the following two lines to be equivalent, where \$ denotes the line end:

```
Here lyeth  mucho rychnesse  in lytell space.  -- John Heywood$
Here lyeth mucho rychnesse in lytell space. -- John Heywood  $
```

The `-w` and `-ignore-all-space` options are stronger than `-b`. They ignore difference even if one file has white space where the other file has none. White space characters include tab, vertical tab, form feed, carriage return, and space; some locales may define additional characters to be white space. With these options, diff considers the following two lines to be equivalent, where \$ denotes the line end and ^M denotes a carriage return:

```
Here lyeth  mucho  rychnesse in lytell space.-- John Heywood$
  He relyeth much erychnes  seinly tells pace.  --John Heywood  ^M$
```

## 1.6 diff.info/Blank Lines

Suppressing Differences in Blank Lines

=====

The `-B` and `-ignore-blank-lines` options ignore insertions or deletions of blank lines. These options normally affect only lines that are completely empty; they do not affect lines that look empty but contain space or tab characters. With these options, for example, a file containing

1. A point is that which has no part.
  2. A line is breadthless length.
- ```
-- Euclid, The Elements, I
```

is considered identical to a file containing

1. A point is that which has no part.
2. A line is breadthless length.

```
-- Euclid, The Elements, I
```

## 1.7 diff.info/Case Folding

Suppressing Case Differences

=====

GNU diff can treat lowercase letters as equivalent to their uppercase counterparts, so that, for example, it considers Funky Stuff, funky STUFF, and fUNKy stuFf to all be the same. To request this, use the `-i` or `-ignore-case` option.

## 1.8 diff.info/Specified Folding

### Suppressing Lines Matching a Regular Expression

---

To ignore insertions and deletions of lines that match a regular expression, use the `-I regexp` or `-ignore-matching-lines=regexp` option. You should escape regular expressions that contain shell metacharacters to prevent the shell from expanding them. For example, `diff -I '^[0-9]'` ignores all changes to lines beginning with a digit.

However, `-I` only ignores the insertion or deletion of lines that contain the regular expression if every changed line in the hunk--every insertion and every deletion--matches the regular expression. In other words, for each nonignorable change, `diff` prints the complete set of changes in its vicinity, including the ignorable ones.

You can specify more than one regular expression for lines to ignore by using more than one `-I` option. `diff` tries to match each line against each regular expression, starting with the last one given.

## 1.9 diff.info/Brief

### Summarizing Which Files Differ

---

When you only want to find out whether files are different, and you don't care what the differences are, you can use the summary output format. In this format, instead of showing the differences between the files, `diff` simply reports whether files differ. The `-q` and `-brief` options select this output format.

This format is especially useful when comparing the contents of two directories. It is also much faster than doing the normal line by line comparisons, because `diff` can stop analyzing the files as soon as it knows that there are any differences.

You can also get a brief indication of whether two files differ by using `cmp`. For files that are identical, `cmp` produces no output. When the files differ, by default, `cmp` outputs the byte offset and line number where the first difference occurs. You can use the `-s` option to suppress that information, so that `cmp` produces no output and reports whether the files differ using only its exit status (see

Invoking `cmp`  
).

Unlike `diff`, `cmp` cannot compare directories; it can only compare two files.

## 1.10 diff.info/Binary

### Binary Files and Forcing Text Comparisons

---

If diff thinks that either of the two files it is comparing is binary (a non-text file), it normally treats that pair of files much as if the summary output format had been selected (see

Brief

), and reports

only that the binary files are different. This is because line by line comparisons are usually not meaningful for binary files.

diff determines whether a file is text or binary by checking the first few bytes in the file; the exact number of bytes is system dependent, but it is typically several thousand. If every character in that part of the file is non-null, diff considers the file to be text; otherwise it considers the file to be binary.

Sometimes you might want to force diff to consider files to be text. For example, you might be comparing text files that contain null characters; diff would erroneously decide that those are non-text files. Or you might be comparing documents that are in a format used by a word processing system that uses null characters to indicate special formatting. You can force diff to consider all files to be text files, and compare them line by line, by using the `-a` or `-text` option. If the files you compare using this option do not in fact contain text, they will probably contain few newline characters, and the diff output will consist of hunks showing differences between long lines of whatever characters the files contain.

You can also force diff to consider all files to be binary files, and report only whether they differ (but not how). Use the `-brief` option for this.

If you want to compare two files byte by byte, you can use the `cmp` program with the `-l` option to show the values of each differing byte in the two files. With GNU `cmp`, you can also use the `-c` option to show the ASCII representation of those bytes. See

Invoking `cmp`

, for more

information.

If `diff3` thinks that any of the files it is comparing is binary (a non-text file), it normally reports an error, because such comparisons are usually not useful. `diff3` uses the same test as `diff` to decide whether a file is binary. As with `diff`, if the input files contain a few non-text characters but otherwise are like text files, you can force `diff3` to consider all files to be text files and compare them line by line by using the `-a` or `-text` options.

---

## 1.11 diff.info/Output Formats

diff Output Formats

\*\*\*\*\*

diff has several mutually exclusive options for output format. The following sections describe each format, illustrating how diff reports the differences between two sample input files.

Sample diff Input

Sample diff input files for examples.

Normal

Showing differences without surrounding text.

Context

Showing differences with the surrounding text.

Side by Side

Showing differences in two columns.

Scripts

Generating scripts for other programs.

If-then-else

Merging files with if-then-else.

## 1.12 diff.info/Sample diff Input

Two Sample Input Files

=====

Here are two sample files that we will use in numerous examples to illustrate the output of diff and how various options can change it.

This is the file lao:

```
The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the mother of all things.
Therefore let there always be non-being,
    so we may see their subtlety,
And let there always be being,
    so we may see their outcome.
The two are the same,
But after they are produced,
    they have different names.
```

This is the file tzu:

The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;  
The named is the mother of all things.

Therefore let there always be non-being,  
so we may see their subtlety,  
And let there always be being,  
so we may see their outcome.  
The two are the same,  
But after they are produced,  
they have different names.  
They both may be called deep and profound.  
Deeper and more profound,  
The door of all subtleties!

In this example, the first hunk contains just the first two lines of lao, the second hunk contains the fourth line of lao opposing the second and third lines of tzu, and the last hunk contains just the last three lines of tzu.

## 1.13 diff.info/Normal

### Showing Differences Without Context

=====

The "normal" diff output format shows each hunk of differences without any surrounding context. Sometimes such output is the clearest way to see how lines have changed, without the clutter of nearby unchanged lines (although you can get similar results with the context or unified formats by using 0 lines of context). However, this format is no longer widely used for sending out patches; for that purpose, the context format (see

Context Format  
) and the unified format (see

Unified Format  
) are superior. Normal format is the default for compatibility with older versions of diff and the Posix standard.

Detailed Normal  
A detailed description of normal output format.

Example Normal  
Sample output in the normal format.

## 1.14 diff.info/Detailed Normal

## Detailed Description of Normal Format

---

The normal output format consists of one or more hunks of differences; each hunk shows one area where the files differ. Normal format hunks look like this:

```
change-command
< from-file-line
< from-file-line ...
---
> to-file-line
> to-file-line ...
```

There are three types of change commands. Each consists of a line number or comma-separated range of lines in the first file, a single character indicating the kind of change to make, and a line number or comma-separated range of lines in the second file. All line numbers are the original line numbers in each file. The types of change commands are:

### lar

Add the lines in range *r* of the second file after line *l* of the first file. For example, *8a12,15* means append lines 12-15 of file 2 after line 8 of file 1; or, if changing file 2 into file 1, delete lines 12-15 of file 2.

### fct

Replace the lines in range *f* of the first file with lines in range *t* of the second file. This is like a combined add and delete, but more compact. For example, *5,7c8,10* means change lines 5-7 of file 1 to read as lines 8-10 of file 2; or, if changing file 2 into file 1, change lines 8-10 of file 2 to read as lines 5-7 of file 1.

### rdl

Delete the lines in range *r* from the first file; line *l* is where they would have appeared in the second file had they not been deleted. For example, *5,7d3* means delete lines 5-7 of file 1; or, if changing file 2 into file 1, append lines 5-7 of file 1 after line 3 of file 2.

## 1.15 diff.info/Example Normal

### An Example of Normal Format

---

Here is the output of the command `diff lao tzu` (see

```
Sample diff Input
```

, for the complete contents of the two files). Notice that it shows only the lines that are different between the two files.

```
1,2d0
```

---



```

< The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
< The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
4c2,3
< The Named is the mother of all things.
---
> The named is the mother of all things.
>
11a11,13
> They both may be called deep and profound.
> Deeper and more profound,
> The door of all subtleties!

```

## 1.16 diff.info/Context

### Showing Differences in Their Context

```
=====
```

Usually, when you are looking at the differences between files, you will also want to see the parts of the files near the lines that differ, to help you understand exactly what has changed. These nearby parts of the files are called the context.

GNU diff provides two output formats that show context around the differing lines: context format and unified format. It can optionally show in which function or section of the file the differing lines are found.

If you are distributing new versions of files to other people in the form of diff output, you should use one of the output formats that show context so that they can apply the diffs even if they have made small changes of their own to the files. patch can apply the diffs in this case by searching in the files for the lines of context around the differing lines; if those lines are actually a few lines away from where the diff says they are, patch can adjust the line numbers accordingly and still apply the diff correctly. See

Imperfect

, for

more information on using patch to apply imperfect diffs.

#### Context Format

An output format that shows surrounding lines.

#### Unified Format

A more compact output format that shows context.

#### Sections

Showing which sections of the files differences are in.

#### Alternate Names

Showing alternate file names in context headers.

## 1.17 diff.info/Context Format

### Context Format

---

The context output format shows several lines of context around the lines that differ. It is the standard format for distributing updates to source code.

To select this output format, use the `-C lines`, `-context[=lines ]`, or `-c` option. The argument lines that some of these options take is the number of lines of context to show. If you do not specify lines, it defaults to three. For proper operation, patch typically needs at least two lines of context.

### Detailed Context

A detailed description of the context output format.

### Example Context

Sample output in context format.

### Less Context

Another sample with less context.

## 1.18 diff.info/Detailed Context

### Detailed Description of Context Format

---

The context output format starts with a two-line header, which looks like this:

```
*** from-file from-file-modification-time
--- to-file to-file-modification time
```

You can change the header's content with the `-L label` or `-label=label` option; see

### Alternate Names

.

Next come one or more hunks of differences; each hunk shows one area where the files differ. Context format hunks look like this:

```
*****
*** from-file-line-range ***
    from-file-line
```

---

```

    from-file-line ...
--- to-file-line-range ----
    to-file-line
    to-file-line ...

```

The lines of context around the lines that differ start with two space characters. The lines that differ between the two files start with one of the following indicator characters, followed by a space character:

!

A line that is part of a group of one or more lines that changed between the two files. There is a corresponding group of lines marked with ! in the part of this hunk for the other file.

+

An "inserted" line in the second file that corresponds to nothing in the first file.

-

A "deleted" line in the first file that corresponds to nothing in the second file.

If all of the changes in a hunk are insertions, the lines of from-file are omitted. If all of the changes are deletions, the lines of to-file are omitted.

## 1.19 diff.info/Example Context

An Example of Context Format

.....

Here is the output of `diff -c lao tzu` (see Sample diff Input, for

the complete contents of the two files). Notice that up to three lines that are not different are shown around each line that is different; they are the context lines. Also notice that the first two hunks have run together, because their contents overlap.

```

*** lao  Sat Jan 26 23:30:39 1991
--- tzu  Sat Jan 26 23:30:50 1991
*****
*** 1,7 ****
- The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
- The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
  The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
! The Named is the mother of all things.
  Therefore let there always be non-being,
    so we may see their subtlety,
  And let there always be being,
--- 1,6 ----
  The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;

```

```

! The named is the mother of all things.
!
  Therefore let there always be non-being,
    so we may see their subtlety,
  And let there always be being,
*****
*** 9,11 ****
--- 8,13 ----
  The two are the same,
  But after they are produced,
    they have different names.
+ They both may be called deep and profound.
+ Deeper and more profound,
+ The door of all subtleties!

```

## 1.20 diff.info/Less Context

An Example of Context Format with Less Context

.....

Here is the output of `diff -context=1 lao tzu` (see

Sample diff Input

, for the complete contents of the two files). Notice that at most one context line is reported here.

```

*** lao  Sat Jan 26 23:30:39 1991
--- tzu  Sat Jan 26 23:30:50 1991
*****
*** 1,5 ****
- The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
- The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
  The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
! The Named is the mother of all things.
  Therefore let there always be non-being,
--- 1,4 ----
  The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
! The named is the mother of all things.
!
  Therefore let there always be non-being,
*****
*** 11 ****
--- 10,13 ----
  they have different names.
+ They both may be called deep and profound.
+ Deeper and more profound,
+ The door of all subtleties!

```

## 1.21 diff.info/Unified Format

Unified Format

-----

The unified output format is a variation on the context format that is more compact because it omits redundant context lines. To select this output format, use the `-U lines`, `-unified[=lines ]`, or `-u` option. The argument `lines` is the number of lines of context to show. When it is not given, it defaults to three.

At present, only GNU diff can produce this format and only GNU patch can automatically apply diffs in this format. For proper operation, patch typically needs at least two lines of context.

Detailed Unified

A detailed description of unified format.

Example Unified

Sample output in unified format.

## 1.22 diff.info/Detailed Unified

Detailed Description of Unified Format

.....

The unified output format starts with a two-line header, which looks like this:

```
--- from-file from-file-modification-time
+++ to-file to-file-modification-time
```

You can change the header's content with the `-L label` or `-label=label` option; see See

Alternate Names

.

Next come one or more hunks of differences; each hunk shows one area where the files differ. Unified format hunks look like this:

```
@@ from-file-range to-file-range @@
line-from-either-file
line-from-either-file ...
```

The lines common to both files begin with a space character. The lines that actually differ between the two files have one of the following indicator characters in the left column:

```
+
  A line was added here to the first file.
```

-

A line was removed here from the first file.

## 1.23 diff.info/Example Unified

An Example of Unified Format

.....

Here is the output of the command `diff -u lao tzu` (see

Sample diff Input

, for the complete contents of the two files):

```

--- lao  Sat Jan 26 23:30:39 1991
+++ tzu  Sat Jan 26 23:30:50 1991
@@ -1,7 +1,6 @@
-The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
-The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
  The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
-The Named is the mother of all things.
+The named is the mother of all things.
+
  Therefore let there always be non-being,
    so we may see their subtlety,
  And let there always be being,
@@ -9,3 +8,6 @@
  The two are the same,
  But after they are produced,
    they have different names.
+They both may be called deep and profound.
+Deeper and more profound,
+The door of all subtleties!
```

## 1.24 diff.info/Sections

Showing Which Sections Differences Are in

-----

Sometimes you might want to know which part of the files each change falls in. If the files are source code, this could mean which function was changed. If the files are documents, it could mean which chapter or appendix was changed. GNU diff can show this by displaying the nearest section heading line that precedes the differing lines. Which lines are "section headings" is determined by a regular expression.

Specified Headings  
 Showing headings that match regular expressions.

C Function Headings  
 Showing headings of C functions.

## 1.25 diff.info/Specified Headings

Showing Lines That Match Regular Expressions

.....

To show in which sections differences occur for files that are not source code for C or similar languages, use the `-F regexp` or `-show-function-line=regexp` option. `diff` considers lines that match the argument `regexp` to be the beginning of a section of the file. Here are suggested regular expressions for some common languages:

```
^[A-Za-z_]
  C, C++, Prolog

^(
  Lisp

^@\ (chapter\ |appendix\ |unnumbered\ |chapheading\ )
  Texinfo
```

This option does not automatically select an output format; in order to use it, you must select the context format (see `Context Format`) or unified format (see `Unified Format`). In other output formats it has no effect.

The `-F` and `-show-function-line` options find the nearest unchanged line that precedes each hunk of differences and matches the given regular expression. Then they add that line to the end of the line of asterisks in the context format, or to the `@@` line in unified format. If no matching line exists, they leave the output for that hunk unchanged. If that line is more than 40 characters long, they output only the first 40 characters. You can specify more than one regular expression for such lines; `diff` tries to match each line against each regular expression, starting with the last one given. This means that you can use `-p` and `-F` together, if you wish.

## 1.26 diff.info/C Function Headings

### Showing C Function Headings

.....

To show in which functions differences occur for C and similar languages, you can use the `-p` or `-show-c-function` option. This option automatically selects the context output format (see

Context Format

),

with the default number of lines of context. You can override that number with `-C` lines later in the command line. You can override both the format and the number with `-U` lines later in the command line.

The `-p` and `-show-c-function` options are equivalent to `-c` `-F'^[_a-zA-Z$]'` (see

Specified Headings

). GNU diff provides them for

the sake of convenience.

## 1.27 diff.info/Alternate Names

### Showing Alternate File Names

-----

If you are comparing two files that have meaningless or uninformative names, you might want diff to show alternate names in the header of the context and unified output formats. To do this, use the `-L` label or `-label=label` option. The first time you give this option, its argument replaces the name and date of the first file in the header; the second time, its argument replaces the name and date of the second file. If you give this option more than twice, diff reports an error. The `-L` option does not affect the file names in the `pr` header when the `-l` or `-paginate` option is used (see

Pagination

).

Here are the first two lines of the output from `diff -C2 -Loriginal -Lmodified lao tzu`:

```
*** original
--- modified
```

## 1.28 diff.info/Side by Side

### Showing Differences Side by Side

=====

diff can produce a side by side difference listing of two files.



The files are listed in two columns with a gutter between them. The gutter contains one of the following markers:

white space

The corresponding lines are in common. That is, either the lines are identical, or the difference is ignored because of one of the -ignore options (see White Space).

|

The corresponding lines differ, and they are either both complete or both incomplete.

<

The files differ and only the first file contains the line.

>

The files differ and only the second file contains the line.

(

Only the first file contains the line, but the difference is ignored.

)

Only the second file contains the line, but the difference is ignored.

\

The corresponding lines differ, and only the first line is incomplete.

/

The corresponding lines differ, and only the second line is incomplete.

Normally, an output line is incomplete if and only if the lines that it contains are incomplete; See

Incomplete Lines

. However, when an

output line represents two differing lines, one might be incomplete while the other is not. In this case, the output line is complete, but its the gutter is marked \ if the first line is incomplete, / if the second line is.

Side by side format is sometimes easiest to read, but it has limitations. It generates much wider output than usual, and truncates lines that are too long to fit. Also, it relies on lining up output more heavily than usual, so its output looks particularly bad if you use varying width fonts, nonstandard tab stops, or nonprinting characters.

You can use the sdiff command to interactively merge side by side differences. See

Interactive Merging

, for more information on merging

files.

---

Side by Side Format  
Controlling side by side output format.

Example Side by Side  
Sample side by side output.

## 1.29 diff.info/Side by Side Format

Controlling Side by Side Format  
=====

The `-y` or `-side-by-side` option selects side by side format. Because side by side output lines contain two input lines, they are wider than usual. They are normally 130 columns, which can fit onto a traditional printer line. You can set the length of output lines with the `-W` columns or `-width=columns` option. The output line is split into two halves of equal length, separated by a small gutter to mark differences; the right half is aligned to a tab stop so that tabs line up. Input lines that are too long to fit in half of an output line are truncated for output.

The `-left-column` option prints only the left column of two common lines. The `-suppress-common-lines` option suppresses common lines entirely.

## 1.30 diff.info/Example Side by Side

An Example of Side by Side Format  
-----

Here is the output of the command `diff -y -W 72 lao tzu` (see

Sample diff Input  
, for the complete contents of the two files).

|                                  |   |                                  |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| The Way that can be told of is n | < |                                  |
| The name that can be named is no | < |                                  |
| The Nameless is the origin of He |   | The Nameless is the origin of He |
| The Named is the mother of all t |   | The named is the mother of all t |
|                                  | > |                                  |
| Therefore let there always be no |   | Therefore let there always be no |
| so we may see their subtlety,    |   | so we may see their subtlety,    |
| And let there always be being,   |   | And let there always be being,   |
| so we may see their outcome.     |   | so we may see their outcome.     |
| The two are the same,            |   | The two are the same,            |
| But after they are produced,     |   | But after they are produced,     |

```

they have different names.
                                they have different names.
                                > They both may be called deep and
                                > Deeper and more profound,
                                > The door of all subtleties!

```

## 1.31 diff.info/Scripts

### Making Edit Scripts

=====

Several output modes produce command scripts for editing from-file to produce to-file.

#### ed Scripts

Using diff to produce commands for ed.

#### Forward ed

Making forward ed scripts.

#### RCS

A special diff output format used by RCS.

## 1.32 diff.info/ed Scripts

### ed Scripts

-----

diff can produce commands that direct the ed text editor to change the first file into the second file. Long ago, this was the only output mode that was suitable for editing one file into another automatically; today, with patch, it is almost obsolete. Use the -e or -ed option to select this output format.

Like the normal format (see

Normal

), this output format does not

show any context; unlike the normal format, it does not include the information necessary to apply the diff in reverse (to produce the first file if all you have is the second file and the diff).

If the file d contains the output of diff -e old new, then the command (cat d && echo w) | ed - old edits old to make it a copy of new. More generally, if d1, d2, ..., dN contain the outputs of diff -e old new1, diff -e new1 new2, ..., diff -e newN-1 newN, respectively, then the command (cat d1 d2 ... dN && echo w) | ed - old edits old to make it a copy of newN.

Detailed ed  
A detailed description of ed format.

Example ed  
A sample ed script.

## 1.33 diff.info/Detailed ed

Detailed Description of ed Format  
.....

The ed output format consists of one or more hunks of differences. The changes closest to the ends of the files come first so that commands that change the number of lines do not affect how ed interprets line numbers in succeeding commands. ed format hunks look like this:

```
change-command  
to-file-line  
to-file-line ...  
.
```

Because ed uses a single period on a line to indicate the end of input, GNU diff protects lines of changes that contain a single period on a line by writing two periods instead, then writing a subsequent ed command to change the two periods into one. The ed format cannot represent an incomplete line, so if the second file ends in a changed incomplete line, diff reports an error and then pretends that a newline was appended.

There are three types of change commands. Each consists of a line number or comma-separated range of lines in the first file and a single character indicating the kind of change to make. All line numbers are the original line numbers in the file. The types of change commands are:

la  
Add text from the second file after line l in the first file. For example, 8a means to add the following lines after line 8 of file 1.

rc  
Replace the lines in range r in the first file with the following lines. Like a combined add and delete, but more compact. For example, 5,7c means change lines 5-7 of file 1 to read as the text file 2.

rd  
Delete the lines in range r from the first file. For example, 5,7d means delete lines 5-7 of file 1.

---

### 1.34 diff.info/Example ed

Example ed Script

.....

Here is the output of diff -e lao tzu (see  
Sample diff Input  
, for  
the complete contents of the two files):

```
11a
They both may be called deep and profound.
Deeper and more profound,
The door of all subtleties!
.
4c
The named is the mother of all things.
.
1,2d
```

### 1.35 diff.info/Forward ed

Forward ed Scripts

-----

diff can produce output that is like an ed script, but with hunks in forward (front to back) order. The format of the commands is also changed slightly: command characters precede the lines they modify, spaces separate line numbers in ranges, and no attempt is made to disambiguate hunk lines consisting of a single period. Like ed format, forward ed format cannot represent incomplete lines.

Forward ed format is not very useful, because neither ed nor patch can apply diffs in this format. It exists mainly for compatibility with older versions of diff. Use the -f or -forward-ed option to select it.

### 1.36 diff.info/RCS

RCS Scripts

-----

The RCS output format is designed specifically for use by the Revision Control System, which is a set of free programs used for

---

organizing different versions and systems of files. Use the `-n` or `-rcs` option to select this output format. It is like the forward ed format (see

```

    Forward ed
    ), but it can represent arbitrary changes to the
contents of a file because it avoids the forward ed format's problems
with lines consisting of a single period and with incomplete lines.
Instead of ending text sections with a line consisting of a single
period, each command specifies the number of lines it affects; a
combination of the a and d commands are used instead of c. Also, if
the second file ends in a changed incomplete line, then the output also
ends in an incomplete line.
```

Here is the output of `diff -n lao tzu` (see  
Sample diff Input  
, for  
the complete contents of the two files):

```

d1 2
d4 1
a4 2
The named is the mother of all things.

a11 3
They both may be called deep and profound.
Deeper and more profound,
The door of all subtleties!
```

## 1.37 diff.info/If-then-else

### Merging Files with If-then-else

=====

You can use `diff` to merge two files of C source code. The output of `diff` in this format contains all the lines of both files. Lines common to both files are output just once; the differing parts are separated by the C preprocessor directives `#ifdef name` or `#ifndef name`, `#else`, and `#endif`. When compiling the output, you select which version to use by either defining or leaving undefined the macro name.

To merge two files, use `diff` with the `-D name` or `-ifdef=name` option. The argument `name` is the C preprocessor identifier to use in the `#ifdef` and `#ifndef` directives.

For example, if you change an instance of `wait (&s)` to `waitpid (-1, &s, 0)` and then merge the old and new files with the `-ifdef=HAVE_WAITPID` option, then the affected part of your code might look like this:

```

do {
#ifdef HAVE_WAITPID
    if ((w = wait (&s)) < 0 && errno != EINTR)
#else /* HAVE_WAITPID */
```

```

        if ((w = waitpid (-1, &s, 0)) < 0 && errno != EINTR)
#endif /* HAVE_WAITPID */
        return w;
    } while (w != child);

```

You can specify formats for languages other than C by using line group formats and line formats, as described in the next sections.

#### Line Group Formats

Formats for general if-then-else line groups.

#### Line Formats

Formats for each line in a line group.

#### Detailed If-then-else

A detailed description of if-then-else format.

#### Example If-then-else

Sample if-then-else format output.

## 1.38 diff.info/Line Group Formats

### Line Group Formats

Line group formats let you specify formats suitable for many applications that allow if-then-else input, including programming languages and text formatting languages. A line group format specifies the output format for a contiguous group of similar lines.

For example, the following command compares the TeX files `old` and `new`, and outputs a merged file in which old regions are surrounded by `\begin{em}-\end{em}` lines, and new regions are surrounded by `\begin{bf}-\end{bf}` lines.

```

diff \
  --old-group-format='\begin{em}
%<\end{em}
' \
  --new-group-format='\begin{bf}
%>\end{bf}
' \
  old new

```

The following command is equivalent to the above example, but it is a little more verbose, because it spells out the default line group formats.

```

diff \
  --old-group-format='\begin{em}
%<\end{em}

```

```
' \
  --new-group-format='\begin{bf}
%>\end{bf}
' \
  --unchanged-group-format='%=' \
  --changed-group-format='\begin{em}
%<\end{em}
\begin{bf}
%>\end{bf}
' \
  old new
```

Here is a more advanced example, which outputs a diff listing with headers containing line numbers in a "plain English" style.

```
diff \
  --unchanged-group-format='' \
  --old-group-format='----- %dn line%(n=1?:s) deleted at %df:
%<' \
  --new-group-format='----- %dN line%(N=1?:s) added after %de:
%>' \
  --changed-group-format='----- %dn line%(n=1?:s) changed at %df:
%<----- to:
%>' \
  old new
```

To specify a line group format, use diff with one of the options listed below. You can specify up to four line group formats, one for each kind of line group. You should quote format, because it typically contains shell metacharacters.

`-old-group-format=format`

These line groups are hunks containing only lines from the first file. The default old group format is the same as the changed group format if it is specified; otherwise it is a format that outputs the line group as-is.

`-new-group-format=format`

These line groups are hunks containing only lines from the second file. The default new group format is same as the the changed group format if it is specified; otherwise it is a format that outputs the line group as-is.

`-changed-group-format=format`

These line groups are hunks containing lines from both files. The default changed group format is the concatenation of the old and new group formats.

`-unchanged-group-format=format`

These line groups contain lines common to both files. The default unchanged group format is a format that outputs the line group as-is.

In a line group format, ordinary characters represent themselves; conversion specifications start with % and have one of the following forms.



`%<`  
stands for the lines from the first file, including the trailing newline. Each line is formatted according to the old line format (see `Line Formats`).

`%>`  
stands for the lines from the second file, including the trailing newline. Each line is formatted according to the new line format.

`%=`  
stands for the lines common to both files, including the trailing newline. Each line is formatted according to the unchanged line format.

`%%`  
stands for `%`.

`%c'C'`  
where `C` is a single character, stands for `C`. `C` may not be a backslash or an apostrophe. For example, `%c':'` stands for a colon, even inside the then-part of an if-then-else format, which a colon would normally terminate.

`%c'@{i}O'`  
where `O` is a string of 1, 2, or 3 octal digits, stands for the character with octal code `O`. For example, `%c'\0'` stands for a null character.

`F n`  
where `F` is a printf conversion specification and `n` is one of the following letters, stands for `n`'s value formatted with `F`.

`e`  
The line number of the line just before the group in the old file.

`f`  
The line number of the first line in the group in the old file; equals `e + 1`.

`l`  
The line number of the last line in the group in the old file.

`m`  
The line number of the line just after the group in the old file; equals `l + 1`.

`n`  
The number of lines in the group in the old file; equals `l - f + 1`.

`E, F, L, M, N`  
Likewise, for lines in the new file.

The printf conversion specification can be `%d`, `%o`, `%x`, or `%X`,

---

specifying decimal, octal, lower case hexadecimal, or upper case hexadecimal output respectively. After the % the following options can appear in sequence: a - specifying left-justification; an integer specifying the minimum field width; and a period followed by an optional integer specifying the minimum number of digits. For example, %5dN prints the number of new lines in the group in a field of width 5 characters, using the printf format "%5d".

(A=B?T:E)

If A equals B then T else E. A and B are each either a decimal constant or a single letter interpreted as above. This format spec is equivalent to T if A's value equals B's; otherwise it is equivalent to E.

For example, %(N=0?no:%dN) line%(N=1?:s) is equivalent to no lines if N (the number of lines in the group in the the new file) is 0, to 1 line if N is 1, and to %dN lines otherwise.

## 1.39 diff.info/Line Formats

### Line Formats

Line formats control how each line taken from an input file is output as part of a line group in if-then-else format.

For example, the following command outputs text with a one-column change indicator to the left of the text. The first column of output is - for deleted lines, | for added lines, and a space for unchanged lines. The formats contain newline characters where newlines are desired on output.

```
diff \
  --old-line-format='- %l
, \
  --new-line-format='| %l
, \
  --unchanged-line-format=' %l
, \
  old new
```

To specify a line format, use one of the following options. You should quote format, since it often contains shell metacharacters.

```
-old-line-format=format
  formats lines just from the first file.
```

```
-new-line-format=format
  formats lines just from the second file.
```

```
-unchanged-line-format=format
  formats lines common to both files.
```

`-line-format=format`  
 formats all lines; in effect, it sets all three above options simultaneously.

In a line format, ordinary characters represent themselves; conversion specifications start with % and have one of the following forms.

`%l`  
 stands for the the contents of the line, not counting its trailing newline (if any). This format ignores whether the line is incomplete; See  
     Incomplete Lines  
     .

`%L`  
 stands for the the contents of the line, including its trailing newline (if any). If a line is incomplete, this format preserves its incompleteness.

`%%`  
 stands for %.

`%c'C'`  
 where C is a single character, stands for C. C may not be a backslash or an apostrophe. For example, `%c':'` stands for a colon.

`%c'@{i}O'`  
 where O is a string of 1, 2, or 3 octal digits, stands for the character with octal code O. For example, `%c'\0'` stands for a null character.

`Fn`  
 where F is a printf conversion specification, stands for the line number formatted with F. For example, `%.5dn` prints the line number using the printf format `"%.5d"`. See  
     Line Group Formats  
     , for  
 more about printf conversion specifications.

The default line format is `%l` followed by a newline character.

If the input contains tab characters and it is important that they line up on output, you should ensure that `%l` or `%L` in a line format is just after a tab stop (e.g. by preceding `%l` or `%L` with a tab character), or you should use the `-t` or `-expand-tabs` option.

Taken together, the line and line group formats let you specify many different formats. For example, the following command uses a format similar to `diff`'s normal format. You can tailor this command to get fine control over `diff`'s output.

```
diff \
  --old-line-format='< %l
', \
  --new-line-format='> %l
```

```

' \
  --old-group-format=' %df%(f=l?:,%dl)d%dE
%<' \
  --new-group-format=' %dea%dF%(F=L?:,%dL)
%>' \
  --changed-group-format=' %df%(f=l?:,%dl)c%dF%(F=L?:,%dL)
%<---
%>' \
  --unchanged-group-format='' \
  old new

```

## 1.40 diff.info/Detailed If-then-else

### Detailed Description of If-then-else Format

For lines common to both files, diff uses the unchanged line group format. For each hunk of differences in the merged output format, if the hunk contains only lines from the first file, diff uses the old line group format; if the hunk contains only lines from the second file, diff uses the new group format; otherwise, diff uses the changed group format.

The old, new, and unchanged line formats specify the output format of lines from the first file, lines from the second file, and lines common to both files, respectively.

The option `-ifdef=name` is equivalent to the following sequence of options using shell syntax:

```

--old-group-format='#ifndef name
%<#endif /* not name */
' \
--new-group-format='#ifdef name
%>#endif /* name */
' \
--unchanged-group-format='%=' \
--changed-group-format='#ifndef name
%<#else /* name */
%>#endif /* name */
,

```

You should carefully check the diff output for proper nesting. For example, when using the `-D name` or `-ifdef=name` option, you should check that if the differing lines contain any of the C preprocessor directives `#ifdef`, `#ifndef`, `#else`, `#elif`, or `#endif`, they are nested properly and match. If they don't, you must make corrections manually. It is a good idea to carefully check the resulting code anyway to make sure that it really does what you want it to; depending on how the input files were produced, the output might contain duplicate or otherwise incorrect code.

The patch `-D name` option behaves just like the diff `-D name` option,

except it operates on a file and a diff to produce a merged file; See

patch Options

.

## 1.41 diff.info/Example If-then-else

An Example of If-then-else Format

-----  
 Here is the output of diff -DTWO lao tzu (see  
 Sample diff Input  
 , for  
 the complete contents of the two files):

```
#ifndef TWO
The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
#endif /* not TWO */
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
#ifndef TWO
The Named is the mother of all things.
#else /* TWO */
The named is the mother of all things.

#endif /* TWO */
Therefore let there always be non-being,
    so we may see their subtlety,
And let there always be being,
    so we may see their outcome.
The two are the same,
But after they are produced,
    they have different names.
#ifdef TWO
They both may be called deep and profound.
Deeper and more profound,
The door of all subtleties!
#endif /* TWO */
```

## 1.42 diff.info/Comparing Directories

Comparing Directories

\*\*\*\*\*

You can use diff to compare some or all of the files in two directory trees. When both file name arguments to diff are directories, it compares each file that is contained in both directories, examining file names in alphabetical order. Normally diff

is silent about pairs of files that contain no differences, but if you use the `-s` or `-report-identical-files` option, it reports pairs of identical files. Normally `diff` reports subdirectories common to both directories without comparing subdirectories' files, but if you use the `-r` or `-recursive` option, it compares every corresponding pair of files in the directory trees, as many levels deep as they go.

For file names that are in only one of the directories, `diff` normally does not show the contents of the file that exists; it reports only that the file exists in that directory and not in the other. You can make `diff` act as though the file existed but was empty in the other directory, so that it outputs the entire contents of the file that actually exists. (It is output as either an insertion or a deletion, depending on whether it is in the first or the second directory given.) To do this, use the `-N` or `-new-file` option.

If the older directory contains one or more large files that are not in the newer directory, you can make the patch smaller by using the `-P` or `-unidirectional-new-file` option instead of `-N`. This option is like `-N` except that it only inserts the contents of files that appear in the second directory but not the first (that is, files that were added). At the top of the patch, write instructions for the user applying the patch to remove the files that were deleted before applying the patch. See

Making Patches

, for more discussion of making patches for distribution.

To ignore some files while comparing directories, use the `-x` pattern or `-exclude=pattern` option. This option ignores any files or subdirectories whose base names match the shell pattern `pattern`. Unlike in the shell, a period at the start of the base of a file name matches a wildcard at the start of a pattern. You should enclose `pattern` in quotes so that the shell does not expand it. For example, the option `-x '*.ao]` ignores any file whose name ends with `.a` or `.o`.

This option accumulates if you specify it more than once. For example, using the options `-x 'RCS'` `-x '*,v'` ignores any file or subdirectory whose base name is `RCS` or ends with `,v`.

If you need to give this option many times, you can instead put the patterns in a file, one pattern per line, and use the `-X file` or `-exclude-from=file` option.

If you have been comparing two directories and stopped partway through, later you might want to continue where you left off. You can do this by using the `-S file` or `-starting-file=file` option. This compares only the file `file` and all alphabetically later files in the topmost directory level.

## 1.43 diff.info/Adjusting Output

## Making diff Output Prettier

\*\*\*\*\*

diff provides several ways to adjust the appearance of its output. These adjustments can be applied to any output format.

### Tabs

Preserving the alignment of tabstops.

### Pagination

Page numbering and timestamping diff output.

## 1.44 diff.info/Tabs

### Preserving Tabstop Alignment

=====

The lines of text in some of the diff output formats are preceded by one or two characters that indicate whether the text is inserted, deleted, or changed. The addition of those characters can cause tabs to move to the next tabstop, throwing off the alignment of columns in the line. GNU diff provides two ways to make tab-aligned columns line up correctly.

The first way is to have diff convert all tabs into the correct number of spaces before outputting them; select this method with the `-t` or `-expand-tabs` option. diff assumes that tabstops are set every 8 columns. To use this form of output with patch, you must give patch the `-l` or `-ignore-white-space` option (see [Changed White Space](#), for more information).

The other method for making tabs line up correctly is to add a tab character instead of a space after the indicator character at the beginning of the line. This ensures that all following tab characters are in the same position relative to tabstops that they were in the original files, so that the output is aligned correctly. Its disadvantage is that it can make long lines too long to fit on one line of the screen or the paper. It also does not work with the unified output format, which does not have a space character after the change type indicator character. Select this method with the `-T` or `-initial-tab` option.

## 1.45 diff.info/Pagination

Paginating diff Output

=====

It can be convenient to have long output page-numbered and time-stamped. The `-l` and `-paginate` options do this by sending the diff output through the `pr` program. Here is what the page header might look like for `diff -lc lao tzu`:

```
Mar 11 13:37 1991  diff -lc lao tzu Page 1
```

## 1.46 diff.info/diff Performance

diff Performance Tradeoffs

\*\*\*\*\*

GNU diff runs quite efficiently; however, in some circumstances you can cause it to run faster or produce a more compact set of changes. There are two ways that you can affect the performance of GNU diff by changing the way it compares files.

Performance has more than one dimension. These options improve one aspect of performance at the cost of another, or they improve performance in some cases while hurting it in others.

The way that GNU diff determines which lines have changed always comes up with a near-minimal set of differences. Usually it is good enough for practical purposes. If the diff output is large, you might want diff to use a modified algorithm that sometimes produces a smaller set of differences. The `-d` or `-minimal` option does this; however, it can also cause diff to run more slowly than usual, so it is not the default behavior.

When the files you are comparing are large and have small groups of changes scattered throughout them, you can use the `-H` or `-speed-large-files` option to make a different modification to the algorithm that diff uses. If the input files have a constant small density of changes, this option speeds up the comparisons without changing the output. If not, diff might produce a larger set of differences; however, the output will still be correct.

Normally diff discards the prefix and suffix that is common to both files before it attempts to find a minimal set of differences. This makes diff run faster, but occasionally it may produce non-minimal output. The `-horizon-lines=lines` option prevents diff from discarding the last lines lines of the prefix and the first lines lines of the suffix. This gives diff further opportunities to find a minimal output.

## 1.47 diff.info/Comparing Three Files



### Comparing Three Files

\*\*\*\*\*

Use the program diff3 to compare three files and show any differences among them. (diff3 can also merge files; see

diff3 Merging  
)

The "normal" diff3 output format shows each hunk of differences without surrounding context. Hunks are labeled depending on whether they are two-way or three-way, and lines are annotated by their location in the input files.

See

Invoking diff3  
, for more information on how to run diff3.

Sample diff3 Input  
Sample diff3 input for examples.

Detailed diff3 Normal  
A detailed description of normal output format.

diff3 Hunks  
The format of normal output format.

Example diff3 Normal  
Sample output in the normal format.

## 1.48 diff.info/Sample diff3 Input

A Third Sample Input File

=====

Here is a third sample file that will be used in examples to illustrate the output of diff3 and how various options can change it. The first two files are the same that we used for diff (see

Sample diff Input  
) . This is the third sample file, called tao:

The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;  
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;  
The named is the mother of all things.

Therefore let there always be non-being,  
so we may see their subtlety,  
And let there always be being,

so we may see their result.  
 The two are the same,  
 But after they are produced,  
 they have different names.

-- The Way of Lao-Tzu, tr. Wing-tsit Chan

## 1.49 diff.info/Detailed diff3 Normal

### Detailed Description of diff3 Normal Format

=====  
 Each hunk begins with a line marked =====. Three-way hunks have plain ===== lines, and two-way hunks have 1, 2, or 3 appended to specify which of the three input files differ in that hunk. The hunks contain copies of two or three sets of input lines each preceded by one or two commands identifying where the lines came from.

Normally, two spaces precede each copy of an input line to distinguish it from the commands. But with the -T or -initial-tab option, diff3 uses a tab instead of two spaces; this lines up tabs correctly. See

    Tabs  
     , for more information.

Commands take the following forms:

file:la

This hunk appears after line l of file file, and contains no lines in that file. To edit this file to yield the other files, one must append hunk lines taken from the other files. For example, 1:11a means that the hunk follows line 11 in the first file and contains no lines from that file.

file:rc

This hunk contains the lines in the range r of file file. The range r is a comma-separated pair of line numbers, or just one number if the range is a singleton. To edit this file to yield the other files, one must change the specified lines to be the lines taken from the other files. For example, 2:11,13c means that the hunk contains lines 11 through 13 from the second file.

If the last line in a set of input lines is incomplete (see

    Incomplete Lines  
     ), it is distinguished on output from a full line by a following line that starts with \ .

## 1.50 diff.info/diff3 Hunks

diff3 Hunks

=====

Groups of lines that differ in two or three of the input files are called diff3 hunks, by analogy with diff hunks (see

Hunks

). If all

three input files differ in a diff3 hunk, the hunk is called a three-way hunk; if just two input files differ, it is a two-way hunk.

As with diff, several solutions are possible. When comparing the files A, B, and C, diff3 normally finds diff3 hunks by merging the two-way hunks output by the two commands diff A B and diff A C. This does not necessarily minimize the size of the output, but exceptions should be rare.

For example, suppose F contains the three lines a, b, f, G contains the lines g, b, g, and H contains the lines a, b, h. diff3 F G H might output the following:

```
====2
1:1c
3:1c
  a
2:1c
  g
====
1:3c
  f
2:3c
  g
3:3c
  h
```

because it found a two-way hunk containing a in the first and third files and g in the second file, then the single line b common to all three files, then a three-way hunk containing the last line of each file.

## 1.51 diff.info/Example diff3 Normal

An Example of diff3 Normal Format

=====

Here is the output of the command diff3 lao tzu tao (see

Sample diff3 Input

, for the complete contents of the files). Notice that it shows only the lines that are different among the three files.

```

====2
1:1,2c
3:1,2c
    The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
    The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
2:0a
====1
1:4c
    The Named is the mother of all things.
2:2,3c
3:4,5c
    The named is the mother of all things.

====3
1:8c
2:7c
    so we may see their outcome.
3:9c
    so we may see their result.
====
1:11a
2:11,13c
    They both may be called deep and profound.
    Deeper and more profound,
    The door of all subtleties!
3:13,14c

    -- The Way of Lao-Tzu, tr. Wing-tsit Chan

```

## 1.52 diff.info/diff3 Merging

### Merging From a Common Ancestor

```
*****
```

When two people have made changes to copies of the same file, diff3 can produce a merged output that contains both sets of changes together with warnings about conflicts.

One might imagine programs with names like diff4 and diff5 to compare more than three files simultaneously, but in practice the need rarely arises. You can use diff3 to merge three or more sets of changes to a file by merging two change sets at a time.

diff3 can incorporate changes from two modified versions into a common preceding version. This lets you merge the sets of changes represented by the two newer files. Specify the common ancestor version as the second argument and the two newer versions as the first and third arguments, like this:

```
diff3 mine older yours
```

You can remember the order of the arguments by noting that they are in alphabetical order.

You can think of this as subtracting older from yours and adding the result to mine, or as merging into mine the changes that would turn older into yours. This merging is well-defined as long as mine and older match in the neighborhood of each such change. This fails to be true when all three input files differ or when only older differs; we call this a conflict. When all three input files differ, we call the conflict an overlap.

diff3 gives you several ways to handle overlaps and conflicts. You can omit overlaps or conflicts, or select only overlaps, or mark conflicts with special <<<<<< and >>>>>> lines.

diff3 can output the merge results as an ed script that that can be applied to the first file to yield the merged output. However, it is usually better to have diff3 generate the merged output directly; this bypasses some problems with ed.

#### Which Changes

Selecting changes to incorporate.

#### Marking Conflicts

Marking conflicts.

#### Bypassing ed

Generating merged output directly.

#### Merging Incomplete Lines

How diff3 merges incomplete lines.

#### Saving the Changed File

Emulating System V behavior.

## 1.53 diff.info/Which Changes

### Selecting Which Changes to Incorporate

=====

You can select all unmerged changes from older to yours for merging into mine with the `-e` or `-ed` option. You can select only the nonoverlapping unmerged changes with `-3` or `-easy-only`, and you can select only the overlapping changes with `-x` or `-overlap-only`.

The `-e`, `-3` and `-x` options select only unmerged changes, i.e. changes where mine and yours differ; they ignore changes from older to yours where mine and yours are identical, because they assume that such changes have already been merged. If this assumption is not a safe one, you can use the `-A` or `-show-all` option (see

Marking Conflicts

).

Here is the output of the command `diff3` with each of these three options (see

Sample diff3 Input  
, for the complete contents of the files). Notice that `-e` outputs the union of the disjoint sets of changes output by `-3` and `-x`.

Output of `diff3 -e lao tzu tao:`

```
11a
    -- The Way of Lao-Tzu, tr. Wing-tsit Chan
.
8c
    so we may see their result.
.
```

Output of `diff3 -3 lao tzu tao:`

```
8c
    so we may see their result.
.
```

Output of `diff3 -x lao tzu tao:`

```
11a
    -- The Way of Lao-Tzu, tr. Wing-tsit Chan
.
```

## 1.54 diff.info/Marking Conflicts

Marking Conflicts

=====

`diff3` can mark conflicts in the merged output by bracketing them with special marker lines. A conflict that comes from two files A and B is marked as follows:

```
<<<<<<< A
lines from A
=====
lines from B
>>>>>>> B
```

A conflict that comes from three files A, B and C is marked as follows:

```
<<<<<<< A
lines from A
||||||| B
lines from B
=====
lines from C
>>>>>>> C
```

The `-A` or `-show-all` option acts like the `-e` option, except that it brackets conflicts, and it outputs all changes from older to yours, not just the unmerged changes. Thus, given the sample input files (see

```

Sample diff3 Input
), diff3 -A lao tzu tao puts brackets around the
conflict where only tzu differs:

```

```

<<<<<< tzu
=====
The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
>>>>>> tao

```

And it outputs the three-way conflict as follows:

```

<<<<<< lao
||||||| tzu
They both may be called deep and profound.
Deeper and more profound,
The door of all subtleties!
=====

-- The Way of Lao-Tzu, tr. Wing-tsit Chan
>>>>>> tao

```

The `-E` or `-show-overlap` option outputs less information than the `-A` or `-show-all` option, because it outputs only unmerged changes, and it never outputs the contents of the second file. Thus the `-E` option acts like the `-e` option, except that it brackets the first and third files from three-way overlapping changes. Similarly, `-X` acts like `-x`, except it brackets all its (necessarily overlapping) changes. For example, for the three-way overlapping change above, the `-E` and `-X` options output the following:

```

<<<<<< lao
=====

-- The Way of Lao-Tzu, tr. Wing-tsit Chan
>>>>>> tao

```

If you are comparing files that have meaningless or uninformative names, you can use the `-L label` or `-label=label` option to show alternate names in the `<<<<<<`, `|||||||` and `>>>>>>` brackets. This option can be given up to three times, once for each input file. Thus `diff3 -A -L X -L Y -L Z A B C` acts like `diff3 -A A B C`, except that the output looks like it came from files named X, Y and Z rather than from files named A, B and C.

## 1.55 diff.info/Bypassing ed

Generating the Merged Output Directly

=====

---

With the `-m` or `-merge` option, `diff3` outputs the merged file directly. This is more efficient than using `ed` to generate it, and works even with non-text files that `ed` would reject. If you specify `-m` without an `ed` script option, `-A` (`-show-all`) is assumed.

For example, the command `diff3 -m lao tzu tao` (see

Sample `diff3` Input

for a copy of the input files) would output the

following:

```

<<<<<<< tzu
=====
The Way that can be told of is not the eternal Way;
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
>>>>>>> tao
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the mother of all things.
Therefore let there always be non-being,
    so we may see their subtlety,
And let there always be being,
    so we may see their result.
The two are the same,
But after they are produced,
    they have different names.
<<<<<<< lao
||||||| tzu
They both may be called deep and profound.
Deeper and more profound,
The door of all subtleties!
=====

-- The Way of Lao-Tzu, tr. Wing-tsit Chan
>>>>>>> tao

```

## 1.56 diff.info/Merging Incomplete Lines

How `diff3` Merges Incomplete Lines

=====

With `-m`, incomplete lines (see `Incomplete Lines`) are simply copied to the output as they are found; if the merged output ends in a conflict and one of the input files ends in an incomplete line, succeeding `|||||||`, `=====` or `>>>>>>>` brackets appear somewhere other than the start of a line because they are appended to the incomplete line.

Without `-m`, if an `ed` script option is specified and an incomplete line is found, `diff3` generates a warning and acts as if a newline had been present.



## 1.57 diff.info/Saving the Changed File

Saving the Changed File

=====

Traditional Unix diff3 generates an ed script without the trailing w and q commands that save the changes. System V diff3 generates these extra commands. GNU diff3 normally behaves like traditional Unix diff3, but with the -i option it behaves like System V diff3 and appends the w and q commands.

The -i option requires one of the ed script options -AeExX3, and is incompatible with the merged output option -m.

## 1.58 diff.info/Interactive Merging

Interactive Merging with sdiff

\*\*\*\*\*

With sdiff, you can merge two files interactively based on a side-by-side -y format comparison (see

Side by Side

). Use -o file or

-output=file to specify where to put the merged text. See

Invoking sdiff

, for more details on the options to sdiff.

Another way to merge files interactively is to use the Emacs Lisp package emerge. See emerge, for more information.

sdiff Option Summary

Summary of sdiff options.

Merge Commands

Merging two files interactively.

## 1.59 diff.info/sdiff Option Summary

Specifying diff Options to sdiff

=====

The following sdiff options have the same meaning as for diff. See

```
diff Options
, for the use of these options.
```

```
-a -b -d -i -t -v
-B -H -I regexp

--ignore-blank-lines  --ignore-case
--ignore-matching-lines=regexp  --ignore-space-change
--left-column  --minimal  --speed-large-files
--suppress-common-lines  --expand-tabs
--text  --version  --width=columns
```

For historical reasons, sdiff has alternate names for some options. The `-l` option is equivalent to the `-left-column` option, and similarly `-s` is equivalent to `-suppress-common-lines`. The meaning of the sdiff `-w` and `-W` options is interchanged from that of diff: with sdiff, `-w columns` is equivalent to `-width=columns`, and `-W` is equivalent to `-ignore-all-space`. sdiff without the `-o` option is equivalent to diff with the `-y` or `-side-by-side` option (see Side by Side).

## 1.60 diff.info/Merge Commands

Merge Commands  
=====

Groups of common lines, with a blank gutter, are copied from the first file to the output. After each group of differing lines, sdiff prompts with % and pauses, waiting for one of the following commands. Follow each command with RET.

- e  
Discard both versions. Invoke a text editor on an empty temporary file, then copy the resulting file to the output.
  - eb  
Concatenate the two versions, edit the result in a temporary file, then copy the edited result to the output.
  - el  
Edit a copy of the left version, then copy the result to the output.
  - er  
Edit a copy of the right version, then copy the result to the output.
  - l  
Copy the left version to the output.
-

q  
Quit.

r  
Copy the right version to the output.

s  
Silently copy common lines.

v  
Verbosely copy common lines. This is the default.

The text editor invoked is specified by the EDITOR environment variable if it is set. The default is system-dependent.

## 1.61 diff.info/Merging with patch

### Merging with patch

\*\*\*\*\*

patch takes comparison output produced by diff and applies the differences to a copy of the original file, producing a patched version. With patch, you can distribute just the changes to a set of files instead of distributing the entire file set; your correspondents can apply patch to update their copy of the files with your changes. patch automatically determines the diff format, skips any leading or trailing headers, and uses the headers to determine which file to patch. This lets your correspondents feed an article or message containing a difference listing directly to patch.

patch detects and warns about common problems like forward patches. It saves the original version of the files it patches, and saves any patches that it could not apply. It can also maintain a patchlevel.h file to ensure that your correspondents apply diffs in the proper order.

patch accepts a series of diffs in its standard input, usually separated by headers that specify which file to patch. It applies diff hunks (see

#### Hunks

) one by one. If a hunk does not exactly match the original file, patch uses heuristics to try to patch the file as well as it can. If no approximate match can be found, patch rejects the hunk and skips to the next hunk. patch normally replaces each file f with its new version, saving the original file in f.orig, and putting reject hunks (if any) into f.rej.

See

Invoking patch  
, for detailed information on the options to

patch. See

Backups  
, for more information on how patch names backup

files. See

Rejects  
, for more information on where patch puts reject hunks.

patch Input  
Selecting the type of patch input.

Imperfect  
Dealing with imperfect patches.

Empty Files  
Removing empty files after patching.

Multiple Patches  
Handling multiple patches in a file specially.

patch Messages  
Messages and questions patch can produce.

## 1.62 diff.info/patch Input

Selecting the patch Input Format  
=====

patch normally determines which diff format the patch file uses by examining its contents. For patch files that contain particularly confusing leading text, you might need to use one of the following options to force patch to interpret the patch file as a certain format of diff. The output formats listed here are the only ones that patch can understand.

-c  
-context  
context diff.

-e  
-ed  
ed script.

-n  
-normal  
normal diff.

-u  
-unified  
unified diff.

---

## 1.63 diff.info/Imperfect

### Applying Imperfect Patches

=====  
patch tries to skip any leading text in the patch file, apply the diff, and then skip any trailing text. Thus you can feed a news article or mail message directly to patch, and it should work. If the entire diff is indented by a constant amount of white space, patch automatically ignores the indentation.

However, certain other types of imperfect input require user intervention.

#### Changed White Space

When tabs and spaces don't match exactly.

#### Reversed Patches

Applying reversed patches correctly.

#### Inexact

Helping patch find close matches.

## 1.64 diff.info/Changed White Space

### Applying Patches with Changed White Space

-----  
Sometimes mailers, editors, or other programs change spaces into tabs, or vice versa. If this happens to a patch file or an input file, the files might look the same, but patch will not be able to match them properly. If this problem occurs, use the `-l` or `-ignore-white-space` option, which makes patch compare white space loosely so that any sequence of white space in the patch file matches any sequence of white space in the input files. Non-white-space characters must still match exactly. Each line of the context must still match a line in the input file.

## 1.65 diff.info/Reversed Patches

### Applying Reversed Patches

-----  
Sometimes people run diff with the new file first instead of second. This creates a diff that is "reversed". To apply such patches, give patch the `-R` or `-reverse` option. patch then attempts to swap each hunk around before applying it. Rejects come out in the swapped format.

---

The `-R` option does not work with `ed` scripts because there is too little information in them to reconstruct the reverse operation.

Often `patch` can guess that the patch is reversed. If the first hunk of a patch fails, `patch` reverses the hunk to see if it can apply it that way. If it can, `patch` asks you if you want to have the `-R` option set; if it can't, `patch` continues to apply the patch normally. This method cannot detect a reversed patch if it is a normal diff and the first command is an append (which should have been a delete) since appends always succeed, because a null context matches anywhere. But most patches add or change lines rather than delete them, so most reversed normal diffs begin with a delete, which fails, and `patch` notices.

If you apply a patch that you have already applied, `patch` thinks it is a reversed patch and offers to un-apply the patch. This could be construed as a feature. If you did this inadvertently and you don't want to un-apply the patch, just answer `n` to this offer and to the subsequent "apply anyway" question--or type `C-c` to kill the patch process.

## 1.66 diff.info/lnexact

### Helping patch Find Inexact Matches

---

For context diffs, and to a lesser extent normal diffs, `patch` can detect when the line numbers mentioned in the patch are incorrect, and it attempts to find the correct place to apply each hunk of the patch. As a first guess, it takes the line number mentioned in the hunk, plus or minus any offset used in applying the previous hunk. If that is not the correct place, `patch` scans both forward and backward for a set of lines matching the context given in the hunk.

First `patch` looks for a place where all lines of the context match. If it cannot find such a place, and it is reading a context or unified diff, and the maximum fuzz factor is set to 1 or more, then `patch` makes another scan, ignoring the first and last line of context. If that fails, and the maximum fuzz factor is set to 2 or more, it makes another scan, ignoring the first two and last two lines of context are ignored. It continues similarly if the maximum fuzz factor is larger.

The `-F lines` or `-fuzz=lines` option sets the maximum fuzz factor to lines. This option only applies to context and unified diffs; it ignores up to lines lines while looking for the place to install a hunk. Note that a larger fuzz factor increases the odds of making a faulty patch. The default fuzz factor is 2; it may not be set to more than the number of lines of context in the diff, ordinarily 3.

If `patch` cannot find a place to install a hunk of the patch, it writes the hunk out to a reject file (see `Rejects`, for information on how reject files are named). It writes out rejected hunks in context

format no matter what form the input patch is in. If the input is a normal or ed diff, many of the contexts are simply null. The line numbers on the hunks in the reject file may be different from those in the patch file: they show the approximate location where patch thinks the failed hunks belong in the new file rather than in the old one.

As it completes each hunk, patch tells you whether the hunk succeeded or failed, and if it failed, on which line (in the new file) patch thinks the hunk should go. If this is different from the line number specified in the diff, it tells you the offset. A single large offset may indicate that patch installed a hunk in the wrong place. patch also tells you if it used a fuzz factor to make the match, in which case you should also be slightly suspicious.

patch cannot tell if the line numbers are off in an ed script, and can only detect wrong line numbers in a normal diff when it finds a change or delete command. It may have the same problem with a context diff using a fuzz factor equal to or greater than the number of lines of context shown in the diff (typically 3). In these cases, you should probably look at a context diff between your original and patched input files to see if the changes make sense. Compiling without errors is a pretty good indication that the patch worked, but not a guarantee.

patch usually produces the correct results, even when it must make many guesses. However, the results are guaranteed only when the patch is applied to an exact copy of the file that the patch was generated from.

## 1.67 diff.info/Empty Files

Removing Empty Files

=====

Sometimes when comparing two directories, the first directory contains a file that the second directory does not. If you give diff the `-N` or `-new-file` option, it outputs a diff that deletes the contents of this file. By default, patch leaves an empty file after applying such a diff. The `-E` or `-remove-empty-files` option to patch deletes output files that are empty after applying the diff.

## 1.68 diff.info/Multiple Patches

Multiple Patches in a File

=====

If the patch file contains more than one patch, patch tries to apply each of them as if they came from separate patch files. This means that it determines the name of the file to patch for each patch, and that it examines the leading text before each patch for file names and

prerequisite revision level (see Making Patches, for more on that topic).

For the second and subsequent patches in the patch file, you can give options and another original file name by separating their argument lists with a +. However, the argument list for a second or subsequent patch may not specify a new patch file, since that does not make sense.

For example, to tell patch to strip the first three slashes from the name of the first patch in the patch file and none from subsequent patches, and to use code.c as the first input file, you can use:

```
patch -p3 code.c + -p0 < patchfile
```

The -S or -skip option ignores the current patch from the patch file, but continue looking for the next patch in the file. Thus, to ignore the first and third patches in the patch file, you can use:

```
patch -S + + -S + < patch file
```

## 1.69 diff.info/patch Messages

Messages and Questions from patch

```
=====
```

patch can produce a variety of messages, especially if it has trouble decoding its input. In a few situations where it's not sure how to proceed, patch normally prompts you for more information from the keyboard. There are options to suppress printing non-fatal messages and stopping for keyboard input.

The message Hmm... indicates that patch is reading text in the patch file, attempting to determine whether there is a patch in that text, and if so, what kind of patch it is.

You can inhibit all terminal output from patch, unless an error occurs, by using the -s, -quiet, or -silent option.

There are two ways you can prevent patch from asking you any questions. The -f or -force option assumes that you know what you are doing. It assumes the following:

- \* skip patches that do not contain file names in their headers;
- \* patch files even though they have the wrong version for the Prereq: line in the patch;
- \* assume that patches are not reversed even if they look like they are.

The -t or -batch option is similar to -f, in that it suppresses

---



questions, but it makes somewhat different assumptions:

- \* skip patches that do not contain file names in their headers (the same as -f);
- \* skip patches for which the file has the wrong version for the Prereq: line in the patch;
- \* assume that patches are reversed if they look like they are.

patch exits with a non-zero status if it creates any reject files. When applying a set of patches in a loop, you should check the exit status, so you don't apply a later patch to a partially patched file.

## 1.70 diff.info/Making Patches

Tips for Making Patch Distributions

\*\*\*\*\*

Here are some things you should keep in mind if you are going to distribute patches for updating a software package.

Make sure you have specified the file names correctly, either in a context diff header or with an Index: line. If you are patching files in a subdirectory, be sure to tell the patch user to specify a -p or -strip option as needed. Take care to not send out reversed patches, since these make people wonder whether they have already applied the patch.

To save people from partially applying a patch before other patches that should have gone before it, you can make the first patch in the patch file update a file with a name like patchlevel.h or version.c, which contains a patch level or version number. If the input file contains the wrong version number, patch will complain immediately.

An even clearer way to prevent this problem is to put a Prereq: line before the patch. If the leading text in the patch file contains a line that starts with Prereq:, patch takes the next word from that line (normally a version number) and checks whether the next input file contains that word, preceded and followed by either white space or a newline. If not, patch prompts you for confirmation before proceeding. This makes it difficult to accidentally apply patches in the wrong order.

Since patch does not handle incomplete lines properly, make sure that all the source files in your program end with a newline whenever you release a version.

To create a patch that changes an older version of a package into a newer version, first make a copy of the older version in a scratch directory. Typically you do that by unpacking a tar or shar archive of the older version.

You might be able to reduce the size of the patch by renaming or

removing some files before making the patch. If the older version of the package contains any files that the newer version does not, or if any files have been renamed between the two versions, make a list of `rm` and `mv` commands for the user to execute in the old version directory before applying the patch. Then run those commands yourself in the scratch directory.

If there are any files that you don't need to include in the patch because they can easily be rebuilt from other files (for example, TAGS and output from `yacc` and `makeinfo`), replace the versions in the scratch directory with the newer versions, using `rm` and `ln` or `cp`.

Now you can create the patch. The de-facto standard diff format for patch distributions is context format with two lines of context, produced by giving `diff` the `-C 2` option. Do not use less than two lines of context, because `patch` typically needs at least two lines for proper operation. Give `diff` the `-P` option in case the newer version of the package contains any files that the older one does not. Make sure to specify the scratch directory first and the newer directory second.

Add to the top of the patch a note telling the user any `rm` and `mv` commands to run before applying the patch. Then you can remove the scratch directory.

## 1.71 diff.info/Invoking cmp

Invoking `cmp`

\*\*\*\*\*

The `cmp` command compares two files, and if they differ, tells the first byte and line number where they differ. Its arguments are as follows:

```
cmp options ... from-file [to-file ]
```

The file name `-` is always the standard input. `cmp` also uses the standard input if one file name is omitted.

An exit status of 0 means no differences were found, 1 means some differences were found, and 2 means trouble.

cmp Options

Summary of options to `cmp`.

## 1.72 diff.info/cmp Options

---

## Options to cmp

=====

Below is a summary of all of the options that GNU cmp accepts. Most options have two equivalent names, one of which is a single letter preceded by -, and the other of which is a long name preceded by -. Multiple single letter options (unless they take an argument) can be combined into a single command line word: -cl is equivalent to -c -l.

- c  
Print the differing characters. Display control characters as a ^ followed by a letter of the alphabet and precede characters that have the high bit set with M- (which stands for "meta").
- ignore-initial=bytes  
Ignore any differences in the the first bytes bytes of the input files. Treat files with fewer than bytes bytes as if they are empty.
- l  
Print the (decimal) offsets and (octal) values of all differing bytes.
- print-chars  
Print the differing characters. Display control characters as a ^ followed by a letter of the alphabet and precede characters that have the high bit set with M- (which stands for "meta").
- quiet
- s
- silent  
Do not print anything; only return an exit status indicating whether the files differ.
- verbose  
Print the (decimal) offsets and (octal) values of all differing bytes.
- v
- version  
Output the version number of cmp.

## 1.73 diff.info/Invoking diff

### Invoking diff

\*\*\*\*\*

The format for running the diff command is:

```
diff options ... from-file to-file
```

In the simplest case, diff compares the contents of the two files from-file and to-file. A file name of - stands for text read from the

standard input. As a special case, `diff - -` compares a copy of standard input to itself.

If `from-file` is a directory and `to-file` is not, `diff` compares the file in `from-file` whose file name is that of `to-file`, and vice versa. The non-directory file must not be `-`.

If both `from-file` and `to-file` are directories, `diff` compares corresponding files in both directories, in alphabetical order; this comparison is not recursive unless the `-r` or `-recursive` option is given. `diff` never compares the actual contents of a directory as if it were a file. The file that is fully specified may not be standard input, because standard input is nameless and the notion of "file with the same name" does not apply.

`diff` options begin with `-`, so normally `from-file` and `to-file` may not begin with `-`. However, `-` as an argument by itself treats the remaining arguments as file names even if they begin with `-`.

An exit status of 0 means no differences were found, 1 means some differences were found, and 2 means trouble.

diff Options  
Summary of options to diff.

## 1.74 diff.info/diff Options

Options to diff

=====

Below is a summary of all of the options that GNU `diff` accepts. Most options have two equivalent names, one of which is a single letter preceded by `-`, and the other of which is a long name preceded by `-`. Multiple single letter options (unless they take an argument) can be combined into a single command line word: `-ac` is equivalent to `-a -c`. Long named options can be abbreviated to any unique prefix of their name. Brackets ([ and ]) indicate that an option takes an optional argument.

`-lines`

Show lines (an integer) lines of context. This option does not specify an output format by itself; it has no effect unless it is combined with `-c` (see Context Format) or `-u` (see Unified Format).

This option is obsolete. For proper operation, `patch` typically needs at least two lines of context.

`-a`

---

Treat all files as text and compare them line-by-line, even if they do not seem to be text. See

Binary

.

-b

Ignore changes in amount of white space. See

White Space

.

-B

Ignore changes that just insert or delete blank lines. See

Blank Lines

.

-brief

Report only whether the files differ, not the details of the differences. See

Brief

.

-c

Use the context output format. See

Context Format

.

-C lines

-context[=*lines* ]

Use the context output format, showing *lines* (an integer) lines of context, or three if *lines* is not given. See

Context Format

. For

proper operation, patch typically needs at least two lines of context.

-changed-group-format=*format*

Use *format* to output a line group containing differing lines from both files in if-then-else format. See

Line Group Formats

.

-d

Change the algorithm perhaps find a smaller set of changes. This makes diff slower (sometimes much slower). See

diff Performance

.

-D *name*

Make merged #ifdef format output, conditional on the preprocessor macro *name*. See

If-then-else

.

-e

-ed

Make output that is a valid ed script. See

---

ed Scripts

.

**-exclude=pattern**

When comparing directories, ignore files and subdirectories whose basenames match pattern. See

Comparing Directories

.

**-exclude-from=file**

When comparing directories, ignore files and subdirectories whose basenames match any pattern contained in file. See

Comparing Directories

.

**-expand-tabs**

Expand tabs to spaces in the output, to preserve the alignment of tabs in the input files. See

Tabs

.

**-f**

Make output that looks vaguely like an ed script but has changes in the order they appear in the file. See

Forward ed

.

**-F regexp**

In context and unified format, for each hunk of differences, show some of the last preceding line that matches regexp. See

Specified Headings

.

**-forward-ed**

Make output that looks vaguely like an ed script but has changes in the order they appear in the file. See

Forward ed

.

**-h**

This option currently has no effect; it is present for Unix compatibility.

**-H**

Use heuristics to speed handling of large files that have numerous scattered small changes. See

diff Performance

.

**-horizon-lines=lines**

Do not discard the last lines lines of the common prefix and the first lines of the common suffix. See

diff Performance

.

- i  
Ignore changes in case; consider upper- and lower-case letters equivalent. See  
    Case Folding  
    .
  
  - I regexp  
Ignore changes that just insert or delete lines that match regexp.  
See  
    Specified Folding  
    .
  
  - ifdef=name  
Make merged if-then-else output using format. See  
    If-then-else  
    .
  
  - ignore-all-space  
Ignore white space when comparing lines. See  
    White Space  
    .
  
  - ignore-blank-lines  
Ignore changes that just insert or delete blank lines. See  
    Blank Lines  
    .
  
  - ignore-case  
Ignore changes in case; consider upper- and lower-case to be the same. See  
    Case Folding  
    .
  
  - ignore-matching-lines=regexp  
Ignore changes that just insert or delete lines that match regexp.  
See  
    Specified Folding  
    .
  
  - ignore-space-change  
Ignore changes in amount of white space. See  
    White Space  
    .
  
  - initial-tab  
Output a tab rather than a space before the text of a line in normal or context format. This causes the alignment of tabs in the line to look normal. See  
    Tabs  
    .
  
  - l  
Pass the output through pr to paginate it. See  
    Pagination  
    .
-

-L label

Use label instead of the file name in the context format (see

Context Format  
) and unified format (see  
Unified Format  
) headers.

See

RCS

.

-label=label

Use label instead of the file name in the context format (see

Context Format  
) and unified format (see  
Unified Format  
) headers.

-left-column

Print only the left column of two common lines in side by side  
format. See

Side by Side Format

.

-line-format=format

Use format to output all input lines in if-then-else format. See

Line Formats

.

-minimal

Change the algorithm to perhaps find a smaller set of changes.  
This makes diff slower (sometimes much slower). See

diff Performance

.

-n

Output RCS-format diffs; like -f except that each command  
specifies the number of lines affected. See

RCS

.

-N

-new-file

In directory comparison, if a file is found in only one directory,  
treat it as present but empty in the other directory. See

Comparing Directories

.

-new-group-format=format

Use format to output a group of lines taken from just the second  
file in if-then-else format. See

Line Group Formats

.

---



- 
- `-new-line-format=format`  
Use format to output a line taken from just the second file in if-then-else format. See  
Line Formats  
.
  - `-old-group-format=format`  
Use format to output a group of lines taken from just the first file in if-then-else format. See  
Line Group Formats  
.
  - `-old-line-format=format`  
Use format to output a line taken from just the first file in if-then-else format. See  
Line Formats  
.
  - `-P`  
Show which C function each change is in. See  
C Function Headings  
.
  - `-P`  
When comparing directories, if a file appears only in the second directory of the two, treat it as present but empty in the other. See  
Comparing Directories  
.
  - `-paginate`  
Pass the output through pr to paginate it. See  
Pagination  
.
  - `-q`  
Report only whether the files differ, not the details of the differences. See  
Brief  
.
  - `-r`  
When comparing directories, recursively compare any subdirectories found. See  
Comparing Directories  
.
  - `-rcs`  
Output RCS-format diffs; like -f except that each command specifies the number of lines affected. See  
RCS  
.
  - `-recursive`  
When comparing directories, recursively compare any subdirectories found. See
-

## Comparing Directories

.

`-report-identical-files`

Report when two files are the same. See  
Comparing Directories

.

`-s`

Report when two files are the same. See  
Comparing Directories

.

`-S file`

When comparing directories, start with the file file. This is  
used for resuming an aborted comparison. See

## Comparing Directories

.

`-sdiff-merge-assist`

Print extra information to help sdiff. sdiff uses this option  
when it runs diff. This option is not intended for users to use  
directly.

`-show-c-function`

Show which C function each change is in. See  
C Function Headings

.

`-show-function-line=regex`

In context and unified format, for each hunk of differences, show  
some of the last preceding line that matches regex. See

## Specified Headings

.

`-side-by-side`

Use the side by side output format. See  
Side by Side Format

.

`-speed-large-files`

Use heuristics to speed handling of large files that have numerous  
scattered small changes. See  
diff Performance

.

`-starting-file=file`

When comparing directories, start with the file file. This is  
used for resuming an aborted comparison. See

## Comparing Directories

.

`-suppress-common-lines`

Do not print common lines in side by side format. See

Side by Side Format

.

-t

Expand tabs to spaces in the output, to preserve the alignment of tabs in the input files. See

Tabs

.

-T

Output a tab rather than a space before the text of a line in normal or context format. This causes the alignment of tabs in the line to look normal. See

Tabs

.

-text

Treat all files as text and compare them line-by-line, even if they do not appear to be text. See

Binary

.

-u

Use the unified output format. See

Unified Format

.

-unchanged-group-format=format

Use format to output a group of common lines taken from both files in if-then-else format. See

Line Group Formats

.

-unchanged-line-format=format

Use format to output a line common to both files in if-then-else format. See

Line Formats

.

-unidirectional-new-file

When comparing directories, if a file appears only in the second directory of the two, treat it as present but empty in the other. See

Comparing Directories

.

-U lines

-unified[=lines ]

Use the unified output format, showing lines (an integer) lines of context, or three if lines is not given. See

Unified Format

. For

proper operation, patch typically needs at least two lines of context.

-v

---

`-version`  
Output the version number of diff.

`-w`  
Ignore white space when comparing lines. See  
White Space  
.

`-W columns`  
`-width=columns`  
Use an output width of columns in side by side format. See  
Side by Side Format  
.

`-x pattern`  
When comparing directories, ignore files and subdirectories whose  
basenames match pattern. See  
Comparing Directories  
.

`-X file`  
When comparing directories, ignore files and subdirectories whose  
basenames match any pattern contained in file. See  
Comparing Directories  
.

`-y`  
Use the side by side output format. See  
Side by Side Format  
.

## 1.75 diff.info/Invoking diff3

### Invoking diff3

\*\*\*\*\*

The `diff3` command compares three files and outputs descriptions of their differences. Its arguments are as follows:

```
diff3 options ... mine older yours
```

The files to compare are `mine`, `older`, and `yours`. At most one of these three file names may be `-`, which tells `diff3` to read the standard input for that file.

An exit status of 0 means `diff3` was successful, 1 means some conflicts were found, and 2 means trouble.

diff3 Options

---

Summary of options to diff3.

## 1.76 diff.info/diff3 Options

Options to diff3

=====

Below is a summary of all of the options that GNU diff3 accepts. Multiple single letter options (unless they take an argument) can be combined into a single command line argument.

-a  
Treat all files as text and compare them line-by-line, even if they do not appear to be text. See  
Binary  
.

-A  
Incorporate all changes from older to yours into mine, surrounding all conflicts with bracket lines. See  
Marking Conflicts  
.

-e  
Generate an ed script that incorporates all the changes from older to yours into mine. See  
Which Changes  
.

-E  
Like -e, except bracket lines from overlapping changes' first and third files. See  
Marking Conflicts  
. With -e, an overlapping  
change looks like this:

```
<<<<<<< mine  
lines from mine  
=====  
lines from yours  
>>>>>>> yours
```

-ed  
Generate an ed script that incorporates all the changes from older to yours into mine. See  
Which Changes  
.

-easy-only  
Like -e, except output only the nonoverlapping changes. See  
Which Changes  
.

-i

Generate w and q commands at the end of the ed script for System V compatibility. This option must be combined with one of the -AeExX3 options, and may not be combined with -m. See

Saving the Changed File

.

-initial-tab

Output a tab rather than two spaces before the text of a line in normal format. This causes the alignment of tabs in the line to look normal. See

Tabs

.

-L label

-label=label

Use the label label for the brackets output by the -A, -E and -X options. This option may be given up to three times, one for each input file. The default labels are the names of the input files. Thus diff3 -L X -L Y -L Z -m A B C acts like diff3 -m A B C, except that the output looks like it came from files named X, Y and Z rather than from files named A, B and C. See

Marking Conflicts

.

-m

-merge

Apply the edit script to the first file and send the result to standard output. Unlike piping the output from diff3 to ed, this works even for binary files and incomplete lines. -A is assumed if no edit script option is specified. See

Bypassing ed

.

-overlap-only

Like -e, except output only the overlapping changes. See

Which Changes

.

-show-all

Incorporate all unmerged changes from older to yours into mine, surrounding all overlapping changes with bracket lines. See

Marking Conflicts

.

-show-overlap

Like -e, except bracket lines from overlapping changes' first and third files. See

Marking Conflicts

.

-T

---

Output a tab rather than two spaces before the text of a line in normal format. This causes the alignment of tabs in the line to look normal. See

Tabs

.

-text

Treat all files as text and compare them line-by-line, even if they do not appear to be text. See

Binary

.

-v

-version

Output the version number of diff3.

-x

Like -e, except output only the overlapping changes. See

Which Changes

.

-X

Like -E, except output only the overlapping changes. In other words, like -x, except bracket changes as in -E. See

Marking Conflicts

.

-3

Like -e, except output only the nonoverlapping changes. See

Which Changes

.

## 1.77 diff.info/Invoking patch

Invoking patch

\*\*\*\*\*

Normally patch is invoked like this:

```
patch <patchfile
```

The full format for invoking patch is:

```
patch options ... [origfile [patchfile ]] [+ options ... [origfile ]]...
```

If you do not specify patchfile, or if patchfile is -, patch reads the patch (that is, the diff output) from the standard input.

You can specify one or more of the original files as orig arguments; each one and options for interpreting it is separated from the others

with a +. See

Multiple Patches  
, for more information.

If you do not specify an input file on the command line, patch tries to figure out from the leading text (any text in the patch that comes before the diff output) which file to edit. In the header of a context or unified diff, patch looks in lines beginning with `***`, `--`, or `+++`; among those, it chooses the shortest name of an existing file. Otherwise, if there is an `Index:` line in the leading text, patch tries to use the file name from that line. If patch cannot figure out the name of an existing file from the leading text, it prompts you for the name of the file to patch.

If the input file does not exist or is read-only, and a suitable RCS or SCCS file exists, patch attempts to check out or get the file before proceeding.

By default, patch replaces the original input file with the patched version, after renaming the original file into a backup file (see

Backups

, for a description of how patch names backup files). You can also specify where to put the output with the `-o output-file` or `-output=output-file` option.

patch Directories

Changing directory and stripping paths.

Backups

Backup file names.

Rejects

Reject file names.

patch Options

Summary table of options to patch.

## 1.78 diff.info/patch Directories

Applying Patches in Other Directories

=====

The `-d directory` or `-directory=directory` option to patch makes `directory` the current directory for interpreting both file names in the patch file, and file names given as arguments to other options (such as `-B` and `-o`). For example, while in a news reading program, you can patch a file in the `/usr/src/emacs` directory directly from the article containing the patch like this:

```
| patch -d /usr/src/emacs
```



Sometimes the file names given in a patch contain leading directories, but you keep your files in a directory different from the one given in the patch. In those cases, you can use the `-p[number ]` or `-strip[=number ]` option to set the file name strip count to number. The strip count tells patch how many slashes, along with the directory names between them, to strip from the front of file names. `-p` with no number given is equivalent to `-p0`. By default, patch strips off all leading paths, leaving just the base file names, except that when a file name given in the patch is a relative path and all of its leading directories already exist, patch does not strip off the leading path. (A relative path is one that does not start with a slash.)

patch looks for each file (after any slashes have been stripped) in the current directory, or if you used the `-d` directory option, in that directory.

For example, suppose the file name in the patch file is `/gnu/src/emacs/etc/NEWS`. Using `-p` or `-p0` gives the entire file name unmodified, `-p1` gives `gnu/src/emacs/etc/NEWS` (no leading slash), `-p4` gives `etc/NEWS`, and not specifying `-p` at all gives `NEWS`.

## 1.79 diff.info/Backups

### Backup File Names

=====

Normally, patch renames an original input file into a backup file by appending to its name the extension `.orig`, or `~` on systems that do not support long file names. The `-b backup-suffix` or `-suffix=backup-suffix` option uses `backup-suffix` as the backup extension instead.

Alternately, you can specify the extension for backup files with the `SIMPLE_BACKUP_SUFFIX` environment variable, which the options override.

patch can also create numbered backup files the way GNU Emacs does. With this method, instead of having a single backup of each file, patch makes a new backup file name each time it patches a file. For example, the backups of a file named `sink` would be called, successively, `sink.~1~`, `sink.~2~`, `sink.~3~`, etc.

The `-V backup-style` or `-version-control=backup-style` option takes as an argument a method for creating backup file names. You can alternately control the type of backups that patch makes with the `VERSION_CONTROL` environment variable, which the `-V` option overrides. The value of the `VERSION_CONTROL` environment variable and the argument to the `-V` option are like the GNU Emacs `version-control` variable (see

emacs

, for more information on backup versions in Emacs). They also recognize synonyms that are more descriptive. The valid values are listed below; unique abbreviations are acceptable.

t

numbered

Always make numbered backups.

nil

existing

Make numbered backups of files that already have them, simple backups of the others. This is the default.

never

simple

Always make simple backups.

Alternately, you can tell patch to prepend a prefix, such as a directory name, to produce backup file names. The `-B backup-prefix` or `-prefix=backup-prefix` option makes backup files by prepending `backup-prefix` to them. If you use this option, patch ignores any `-b` option that you give.

If the backup file already exists, patch creates a new backup file name by changing the first lowercase letter in the last component of the file name into uppercase. If there are no more lowercase letters in the name, it removes the first character from the name. It repeats this process until it comes up with a backup file name that does not already exist.

If you specify the output file with the `-o` option, that file is the one that is backed up, not the input file.

## 1.80 diff.info/Rejects

Reject File Names

=====

The names for reject files (files containing patches that patch could not find a place to apply) are normally the name of the output file with `.rej` appended (or `#` on systems that do not support long file names).

Alternatively, you can tell patch to place all of the rejected patches in a single file. The `-r reject-file` or `-reject-file=reject-file` option uses `reject-file` as the reject file name.

## 1.81 diff.info/patch Options

Options to patch

=====

Here is a summary of all of the options that patch accepts. Older

---

versions of patch do not accept long-named options or the `-t`, `-E`, or `-V` options.

Multiple single-letter options that do not take an argument can be combined into a single command line argument (with only one dash). Brackets ([ and ]) indicate that an option takes an optional argument.

`-b backup-suffix`

Use backup-suffix as the backup extension instead of `.orig` or `~`.  
See

Backups

.

`-B backup-prefix`

Use backup-prefix as a prefix to the backup file name. If this option is specified, any `-b` option is ignored. See

Backups

.

`-batch`

Do not ask any questions. See  
patch Messages

.

`-c`

`-context`

Interpret the patch file as a context diff. See  
patch Input

.

`-d directory`

`-directory=directory`

Makes directory directory the current directory for interpreting both file names in the patch file, and file names given as arguments to other options. See

patch Directories

.

`-D name`

Make merged if-then-else output using format. See  
If-then-else

.

`-debug=number`

Set internal debugging flags. Of interest only to patch patchers.

`-e`

`-ed`

Interpret the patch file as an ed script. See  
patch Input

.

`-E`

Remove output files that are empty after the patches have been applied. See

Empty Files

.

- 
- f  
Assume that the user knows exactly what he or she is doing, and do not ask any questions. See  
    patch Messages  
    .
  
  - F lines  
Set the maximum fuzz factor to lines. See  
    Inexact  
    .
  
  - force  
Assume that the user knows exactly what he or she is doing, and do not ask any questions. See  
    patch Messages  
    .
  
  - forward  
Ignore patches that patch thinks are reversed or already applied. See also -R. See  
    Reversed Patches  
    .
  
  - fuzz=lines  
Set the maximum fuzz factor to lines. See  
    Inexact  
    .
  
  - help  
Print a summary of the options that patch recognizes, then exit.
  
  - ifdef=name  
Make merged if-then-else output using format. See  
    If-then-else  
    .
  
  - ignore-white-space  
-l  
Let any sequence of white space in the patch file match any sequence of white space in the input file. See  
    Changed White Space  
    .
  
  - n
  - normal  
Interpret the patch file as a normal diff. See  
    patch Input  
    .
  
  - N  
Ignore patches that patch thinks are reversed or already applied. See also -R. See  
    Reversed Patches  
    .
-

---

-o output-file  
-output=output-file  
    Use output-file as the output file name. See  
    patch Options  
    .

-p[number ]  
    Set the file name strip count to number. See  
    patch Directories  
    .

-prefix=backup-prefix  
    Use backup-prefix as a prefix to the backup file name. If this  
    option is specified, any -b option is ignored. See  
    Backups  
    .

-quiet  
    Work silently unless an error occurs. See  
    patch Messages  
    .

-r reject-file  
    Use reject-file as the reject file name. See  
    Rejects  
    .

-R  
    Assume that this patch was created with the old and new files  
    swapped. See  
    Reversed Patches  
    .

-reject-file=reject-file  
    Use reject-file as the reject file name. See  
    Rejects  
    .

-remove-empty-files  
    Remove output files that are empty after the patches have been  
    applied. See  
    Empty Files  
    .

-reverse  
    Assume that this patch was created with the old and new files  
    swapped. See  
    Reversed Patches  
    .

-s  
    Work silently unless an error occurs. See  
    patch Messages  
    .

-S  
    Ignore this patch from the patch file, but continue looking for

---

the next patch in the file. See  
Multiple Patches  
.

-silent  
Work silently unless an error occurs. See  
patch Messages  
.

-skip  
Ignore this patch from the patch file, but continue looking for  
the next patch in the file. See  
Multiple Patches  
.

-strip[=number ]  
Set the file name strip count to number. See  
patch Directories  
.

-suffix=backup-suffix  
Use backup-suffix as the backup extension instead of .orig or ~.  
See  
Backups  
.

-t  
Do not ask any questions. See  
patch Messages  
.

-u  
-unified  
Interpret the patch file as a unified diff. See  
patch Input  
.

-v  
Output the revision header and patch level of patch.

-V backup-style  
Select the kind of backups to make. See  
Backups  
.

-version  
Output the revision header and patch level of patch, then exit.

-version=control=backup-style  
Select the kind of backups to make. See  
Backups  
.

-x number  
Set internal debugging flags. Of interest only to patch patchers.

---

## 1.82 diff.info/Invoking sdiff

Invoking sdiff

\*\*\*\*\*

The sdiff command merges two files and interactively outputs the results. Its arguments are as follows:

```
sdiff -o outfile options ... from-file to-file
```

This merges from-file with to-file, with output to outfile. If from-file is a directory and to-file is not, sdiff compares the file in from-file whose file name is that of to-file, and vice versa. from-file and to-file may not both be directories.

sdiff options begin with -, so normally from-file and to-file may not begin with -. However, - as an argument by itself treats the remaining arguments as file names even if they begin with -. You may not use - as an input file.

An exit status of 0 means no differences were found, 1 means some differences were found, and 2 means trouble.

sdiff without -o (or -output) produces a side-by-side difference. This usage is obsolete; use diff -side-by-side instead.

sdiff Options

Summary of options to diff.

## 1.83 diff.info/sdiff Options

Options to sdiff

=====

Below is a summary of all of the options that GNU sdiff accepts. Each option has two equivalent names, one of which is a single letter preceded by -, and the other of which is a long name preceded by -. Multiple single letter options (unless they take an argument) can be combined into a single command line argument. Long named options can be abbreviated to any unique prefix of their name.

-a

Treat all files as text and compare them line-by-line, even if they do not appear to be text. See

Binary

.

- 
- b  
Ignore changes in amount of white space. See  
White Space  
.
  
  - B  
Ignore changes that just insert or delete blank lines. See  
Blank Lines  
.
  
  - d  
Change the algorithm to perhaps find a smaller set of changes.  
This makes sdiff slower (sometimes much slower). See  
diff Performance  
.
  
  - H  
Use heuristics to speed handling of large files that have numerous  
scattered small changes. See  
diff Performance  
.
  
  - expand-tabs  
Expand tabs to spaces in the output, to preserve the alignment of  
tabs in the input files. See  
Tabs  
.
  
  - i  
Ignore changes in case; consider upper- and lower-case to be the  
same. See  
Case Folding  
.
  
  - I regexp  
Ignore changes that just insert or delete lines that match regexp.  
See  
Specified Folding  
.
  
  - ignore-all-space  
Ignore white space when comparing lines. See  
White Space  
.
  
  - ignore-blank-lines  
Ignore changes that just insert or delete blank lines. See  
Blank Lines  
.
  
  - ignore-case  
Ignore changes in case; consider upper- and lower-case to be the  
same. See
-



## Case Folding

.

`-ignore-matching-lines=regexp`

Ignore changes that just insert or delete lines that match regexp.  
See

## Specified Folding

.

`-ignore-space-change`

Ignore changes in amount of white space. See  
White Space

.

`-l`

`-left-column`

Print only the left column of two common lines. See

## Side by Side Format

.

`-minimal`

Change the algorithm to perhaps find a smaller set of changes.  
This makes `sdiff` slower (sometimes much slower). See

## diff Performance

.

`-o file`

`-output=file`

Put merged output into file. This option is required for merging.

`-s`

`-suppress-common-lines`

Do not print common lines. See  
Side by Side Format

.

`-speed-large-files`

Use heuristics to speed handling of large files that have numerous  
scattered small changes. See  
diff Performance

.

`-t`

Expand tabs to spaces in the output, to preserve the alignment of  
tabs in the input files. See  
Tabs

.

`-text`

Treat all files as text and compare them line-by-line, even if they  
do not appear to be text. See

## Binary

.

`-v`

---

-version

Output the version number of sdiff.

-w columns

-width=columns

Use an output width of columns. See

Side by Side Format

. Note

that for historical reasons, this option is -W in diff, -w in sdiff.

-W

Ignore horizontal white space when comparing lines. See

White Space

. Note that for historical reasons, this option is -w

in diff, -W in sdiff.

## 1.84 diff.info/Incomplete Lines

Incomplete Lines

\*\*\*\*\*

When an input file ends in a non-newline character, its last line is called an incomplete line because its last character is not a newline. All other lines are called full lines and end in a newline character. Incomplete lines do not match full lines unless differences in blank lines are ignored (see

Blank Lines

).

An incomplete line is normally distinguished on output from a full line by a following line that starts with \ . However, the RCS format (see

RCS

) outputs the incomplete line as-is, without any trailing newline or following line. The side by side format normally represents incomplete lines as-is, but in some cases uses a \ or / gutter marker; See

Side by Side

. The if-then-else line format preserves a line's incompleteness with %L, and discards the newline with %l; See

Line Formats

. Finally, with the ed and forward ed output formats (see

Output Formats

) diff cannot represent an incomplete line, so it pretends there was a newline and reports an error.

For example, suppose F and G are one-byte files that contain just f and g, respectively. Then diff F G outputs

```

1c1
< f
\ No newline at end of file
---
> g
\ No newline at end of file

```

(The exact message may differ in non-English locales.) `diff -n F G` outputs the following without a trailing newline:

```

d1 1
a1 1
g

```

`diff -e F G` reports two errors and outputs the following:

```

1c
g
.

```

## 1.85 diff.info/Projects

### Future Projects

\*\*\*\*\*

Here are some ideas for improving GNU diff and patch. The GNU project has identified some improvements as potential programming projects for volunteers. You can also help by reporting any bugs that you find.

If you are a programmer and would like to contribute something to the GNU project, please consider volunteering for one of these projects. If you are seriously contemplating work, please write to `gnu@prep.ai.mit.edu` to coordinate with other volunteers.

### Shortcomings

Suggested projects for improvements.

### Bugs

Reporting bugs.

## 1.86 diff.info/Shortcomings

Suggested Projects for Improving GNU diff and patch

=====

---

One should be able to use GNU diff to generate a patch from any pair of directory trees, and given the patch and a copy of one such tree, use patch to generate a faithful copy of the other. Unfortunately, some changes to directory trees cannot be expressed using current patch formats; also, patch does not handle some of the existing formats. These shortcomings motivate the following suggested projects.

#### Changing Structure

Handling changes to the directory structure.

#### Special Files

Handling symbolic links, device special files, etc.

#### Unusual File Names

Handling file names that contain unusual characters.

#### Arbitrary Limits

Patching non-text files.

#### Large Files

Handling files that do not fit in memory.

#### Ignoring Changes

Ignoring certain changes while showing others.

## 1.87 diff.info/Changing Structure

### Handling Changes to the Directory Structure

-----

diff and patch do not handle some changes to directory structure. For example, suppose one directory tree contains a directory named D with some subsidiary files, and another contains a file with the same name D. diff -r does not output enough information for patch to transform the the directory subtree into the file.

There should be a way to specify that a file has been deleted without having to include its entire contents in the patch file. There should also be a way to tell patch that a file was renamed, even if there is no way for diff to generate such information.

These problems can be fixed by extending the diff output format to represent changes in directory structure, and extending patch to understand these extensions.

## 1.88 diff.info/Special Files

---

## Files that are Neither Directories Nor Regular Files

---

Some files are neither directories nor regular files: they are unusual files like symbolic links, device special files, named pipes, and sockets. Currently, diff treats symbolic links like regular files; it treats other special files like regular files if they are specified at the top level, but simply reports their presence when comparing directories. This means that patch cannot represent changes to such files. For example, if you change which file a symbolic link points to, diff outputs the difference between the two files, instead of the change to the symbolic link.

diff should optionally report changes to special files specially, and patch should be extended to understand these extensions.

## 1.89 diff.info/Unusual File Names

### File Names that Contain Unusual Characters

---

When a file name contains an unusual character like a newline or white space, diff -r generates a patch that patch cannot parse. The problem is with format of diff output, not just with patch, because with odd enough file names one can cause diff to generate a patch that is syntactically correct but patches the wrong files. The format of diff output should be extended to handle all possible file names.

## 1.90 diff.info/Arbitrary Limits

### Arbitrary Limits

---

GNU diff can analyze files with arbitrarily long lines and files that end in incomplete lines. However, patch cannot patch such files. The patch internal limits on line lengths should be removed, and patch should be extended to parse diff reports of incomplete lines.

## 1.91 diff.info/Large Files

### Handling Files that Do Not Fit in Memory

---

diff operates by reading both files into memory. This method fails if the files are too large, and diff should have a fallback.

---

One way to do this is to scan the files sequentially to compute hash codes of the lines and put the lines in equivalence classes based only on hash code. Then compare the files normally. This does produce some false matches.

Then scan the two files sequentially again, checking each match to see whether it is real. When a match is not real, mark both the "matching" lines as changed. Then build an edit script as usual.

The output routines would have to be changed to scan the files sequentially looking for the text to print.

## 1.92 diff.info/Ignoring Changes

Ignoring Certain Changes  
-----

It would be nice to have a feature for specifying two strings, one in from-file and one in to-file, which should be considered to match. Thus, if the two strings are foo and bar, then if two lines differ only in that foo in file 1 corresponds to bar in file 2, the lines are treated as identical.

It is not clear how general this feature can or should be, or what syntax should be used for it.

## 1.93 diff.info/Bugs

Reporting Bugs  
=====

If you think you have found a bug in GNU cmp, diff, diff3, sdiff, or patch, please report it by electronic mail to bug-gnu-utils@prep.ai.mit.edu. Send as precise a description of the problem as you can, including sample input files that produce the bug, if applicable.

Because Larry Wall has not released a new version of patch since mid 1988 and the GNU version of patch has been changed since then, please send bug reports for patch by electronic mail to both bug-gnu-utils@prep.ai.mit.edu and lwall@netlabs.com.

## 1.94 diff.info/Concept Index

Concept Index

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