

# **GAWK: Effective AWK Programming**

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A User's Guide for GNU Awk  
Edition 4  
June, 2011

**Arnold D. Robbins**

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*To Miriam, for making me complete.*

*To Chana, for the joy you bring us.*

*To Rivka, for the exponential increase.*

*To Nachum, for the added dimension.*

*To Malka, for the new beginning.*



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## Foreword

Arnold Robbins and I are good friends. We were introduced in 1990 by circumstances—and our favorite programming language, AWK. The circumstances started a couple of years earlier. I was working at a new job and noticed an unplugged Unix computer sitting in the corner. No one knew how to use it, and neither did I. However, a couple of days later it was running, and I was `root` and the one-and-only user. That day, I began the transition from statistician to Unix programmer.

On one of many trips to the library or bookstore in search of books on Unix, I found the gray AWK book, a.k.a. Aho, Kernighan and Weinberger, *The AWK Programming Language*, Addison-Wesley, 1988. AWK’s simple programming paradigm—find a pattern in the input and then perform an action—often reduced complex or tedious data manipulations to few lines of code. I was excited to try my hand at programming in AWK.

Alas, the `awk` on my computer was a limited version of the language described in the AWK book. I discovered that my computer had “old `awk`” and the AWK book described “new `awk`.” I learned that this was typical; the old version refused to step aside or relinquish its name. If a system had a new `awk`, it was invariably called `nawk`, and few systems had it. The best way to get a new `awk` was to `ftp` the source code for `gawk` from `prep.ai.mit.edu`. `gawk` was a version of new `awk` written by David Trueman and Arnold, and available under the GNU General Public License.

(Incidentally, it’s no longer difficult to find a new `awk`. `gawk` ships with GNU/Linux, and you can download binaries or source code for almost any system; my wife uses `gawk` on her VMS box.)

My Unix system started out unplugged from the wall; it certainly was not plugged into a network. So, oblivious to the existence of `gawk` and the Unix community in general, and desiring a new `awk`, I wrote my own, called `mawk`. Before I was finished I knew about `gawk`, but it was too late to stop, so I eventually posted to a `comp.sources` newsgroup.

A few days after my posting, I got a friendly email from Arnold introducing himself. He suggested we share design and algorithms and attached a draft of the POSIX standard so that I could update `mawk` to support language extensions added after publication of the AWK book.

Frankly, if our roles had been reversed, I would not have been so open and we probably would have never met. I’m glad we did meet. He is an AWK expert’s AWK expert and a genuinely nice person. Arnold contributes significant amounts of his expertise and time to the Free Software Foundation.

This book is the `gawk` reference manual, but at its core it is a book about AWK programming that will appeal to a wide audience. It is a definitive reference to the AWK language as defined by the 1987 Bell Laboratories release and codified in the 1992 POSIX Utilities standard.

On the other hand, the novice AWK programmer can study a wealth of practical programs that emphasize the power of AWK’s basic idioms: data driven control-flow, pattern matching with regular expressions, and associative arrays. Those looking for something new can try out `gawk`’s interface to network protocols via special `‘/inet’` files.

The programs in this book make clear that an AWK program is typically much smaller and faster to develop than a counterpart written in C. Consequently, there is often a payoff

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to prototype an algorithm or design in AWK to get it running quickly and expose problems early. Often, the interpreted performance is adequate and the AWK prototype becomes the product.

The new `pgawk` (profiling `gawk`), produces program execution counts. I recently experimented with an algorithm that for  $n$  lines of input, exhibited  $\sim Cn^2$  performance, while theory predicted  $\sim Cn \log n$  behavior. A few minutes poring over the `awkprof.out` profile pinpointed the problem to a single line of code. `pgawk` is a welcome addition to my programmer's toolbox.

Arnold has distilled over a decade of experience writing and using AWK programs, and developing `gawk`, into this book. If you use AWK or want to learn how, then read this book.

Michael Brennan  
Author of `mawk`  
March, 2001

## Preface

Several kinds of tasks occur repeatedly when working with text files. You might want to extract certain lines and discard the rest. Or you may need to make changes wherever certain patterns appear, but leave the rest of the file alone. Writing single-use programs for these tasks in languages such as C, C++, or Java is time-consuming and inconvenient. Such jobs are often easier with `awk`. The `awk` utility interprets a special-purpose programming language that makes it easy to handle simple data-reformatting jobs.

The GNU implementation of `awk` is called `gawk`; it is fully compatible with the POSIX<sup>1</sup> specification of the `awk` language and with the Unix version of `awk` maintained by Brian Kernighan. This means that all properly written `awk` programs should work with `gawk`. Thus, we usually don't distinguish between `gawk` and other `awk` implementations.

Using `awk` allows you to:

- Manage small, personal databases
- Generate reports
- Validate data
- Produce indexes and perform other document preparation tasks
- Experiment with algorithms that you can adapt later to other computer languages

In addition, `gawk` provides facilities that make it easy to:

- Extract bits and pieces of data for processing
- Sort data
- Perform simple network communications

This book teaches you about the `awk` language and how you can use it effectively. You should already be familiar with basic system commands, such as `cat` and `ls`,<sup>2</sup> as well as basic shell facilities, such as input/output (I/O) redirection and pipes.

Implementations of the `awk` language are available for many different computing environments. This book, while describing the `awk` language in general, also describes the particular implementation of `awk` called `gawk` (which stands for “GNU `awk`”). `gawk` runs on a broad range of Unix systems, ranging from Intel<sup>®</sup>-architecture PC-based computers up through large-scale systems, such as Crays. `gawk` has also been ported to Mac OS X, Microsoft Windows (all versions) and OS/2 PCs, and VMS. (Some other, obsolete systems to which `gawk` was once ported are no longer supported and the code for those systems has been removed.)

## History of `awk` and `gawk`

Recipe For A Programming Language

1 part <code>egrep</code>	1 part <code>snobol</code>
2 parts <code>ed</code>	3 parts C

<sup>1</sup> The 2008 POSIX standard can be found online at <http://www.opengroup.org/onlinepubs/9699919799/>.

<sup>2</sup> These commands are available on POSIX-compliant systems, as well as on traditional Unix-based systems. If you are using some other operating system, you still need to be familiar with the ideas of I/O redirection and pipes.

## 4 GAWK: Effective AWK Programming

Blend all parts well using `lex` and `yacc`. Document minimally and release.

After eight years, add another part `egrep` and two more parts C. Document very well and release.

The name `awk` comes from the initials of its designers: Alfred V. Aho, Peter J. Weinberger and Brian W. Kernighan. The original version of `awk` was written in 1977 at AT&T Bell Laboratories. In 1985, a new version made the programming language more powerful, introducing user-defined functions, multiple input streams, and computed regular expressions. This new version became widely available with Unix System V Release 3.1 (1987). The version in System V Release 4 (1989) added some new features and cleaned up the behavior in some of the “dark corners” of the language. The specification for `awk` in the POSIX Command Language and Utilities standard further clarified the language. Both the `gawk` designers and the original Bell Laboratories `awk` designers provided feedback for the POSIX specification.

Paul Rubin wrote the GNU implementation, `gawk`, in 1986. Jay Fenlason completed it, with advice from Richard Stallman. John Woods contributed parts of the code as well. In 1988 and 1989, David Trueman, with help from me, thoroughly reworked `gawk` for compatibility with the newer `awk`. Circa 1994, I became the primary maintainer. Current development focuses on bug fixes, performance improvements, standards compliance, and occasionally, new features.

In May of 1997, Jürgen Kahrs felt the need for network access from `awk`, and with a little help from me, set about adding features to do this for `gawk`. At that time, he also wrote the bulk of *TCP/IP Internetworking with gawk* (a separate document, available as part of the `gawk` distribution). His code finally became part of the main `gawk` distribution with `gawk` version 3.1.

John Haque rewrote the `gawk` internals, in the process providing an `awk`-level debugger. This version became available as `gawk` version 4.0, in 2011.

See [Section A.8 \[Major Contributors to gawk\]](#), page 307, for a complete list of those who made important contributions to `gawk`.

### A Rose by Any Other Name

The `awk` language has evolved over the years. Full details are provided in [Appendix A \[The Evolution of the awk Language\]](#), page 301. The language described in this book is often referred to as “new `awk`” (`nawk`).

Because of this, there are systems with multiple versions of `awk`. Some systems have an `awk` utility that implements the original version of the `awk` language and a `nawk` utility for the new version. Others have an `oawk` version for the “old `awk`” language and plain `awk` for the new one. Still others only have one version, which is usually the new one.<sup>3</sup>

All in all, this makes it difficult for you to know which version of `awk` you should run when writing your programs. The best advice we can give here is to check your local documentation. Look for `awk`, `oawk`, and `nawk`, as well as for `gawk`. It is likely that you already have some version of new `awk` on your system, which is what you should use when running your programs. (Of course, if you’re reading this book, chances are good that you have `gawk`!)

---

<sup>3</sup> Often, these systems use `gawk` for their `awk` implementation!

Throughout this book, whenever we refer to a language feature that should be available in any complete implementation of POSIX `awk`, we simply use the term `awk`. When referring to a feature that is specific to the GNU implementation, we use the term `gawk`.

## Using This Book

The term `awk` refers to a particular program as well as to the language you use to tell this program what to do. When we need to be careful, we call the language “the `awk` language,” and the program “the `awk` utility.” This book explains both how to write programs in the `awk` language and how to run the `awk` utility. The term *awk program* refers to a program written by you in the `awk` programming language.

Primarily, this book explains the features of `awk` as defined in the POSIX standard. It does so in the context of the `gawk` implementation. While doing so, it also attempts to describe important differences between `gawk` and other `awk` implementations.<sup>4</sup> Finally, any `gawk` features that are not in the POSIX standard for `awk` are noted.

This book has the difficult task of being both a tutorial and a reference. If you are a novice, feel free to skip over details that seem too complex. You should also ignore the many cross-references; they are for the expert user and for the online Info and HTML versions of the document.

There are subsections labeled as **Advanced Notes** scattered throughout the book. They add a more complete explanation of points that are relevant, but not likely to be of interest on first reading. All appear in the index, under the heading “advanced features.”

Most of the time, the examples use complete `awk` programs. Some of the more advanced sections show only the part of the `awk` program that illustrates the concept currently being described.

While this book is aimed principally at people who have not been exposed to `awk`, there is a lot of information here that even the `awk` expert should find useful. In particular, the description of POSIX `awk` and the example programs in [Chapter 12 \[A Library of `awk` Functions\]](#), page 211, and in [Chapter 13 \[Practical `awk` Programs\]](#), page 241, should be of interest.

[Chapter 1 \[Getting Started with `awk`\]](#), page 11, provides the essentials you need to know to begin using `awk`.

[Chapter 2 \[Running `awk` and `gawk`\]](#), page 25, describes how to run `gawk`, the meaning of its command-line options, and how it finds `awk` program source files.

[Chapter 3 \[Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37, introduces regular expressions in general, and in particular the flavors supported by POSIX `awk` and `gawk`.

[Chapter 4 \[Reading Input Files\]](#), page 49, describes how `awk` reads your data. It introduces the concepts of records and fields, as well as the `getline` command. I/O redirection is first described here. Network I/O is also briefly introduced here.

[Chapter 5 \[Printing Output\]](#), page 73, describes how `awk` programs can produce output with `print` and `printf`.

[Chapter 6 \[Expressions\]](#), page 89, describes expressions, which are the basic building blocks for getting most things done in a program.

---

<sup>4</sup> All such differences appear in the index under the entry “differences in `awk` and `gawk`.”

## 6 GAWK: Effective AWK Programming

Chapter 7 [Patterns, Actions, and Variables], page 111, describes how to write patterns for matching records, actions for doing something when a record is matched, and the built-in variables `awk` and `gawk` use.

Chapter 8 [Arrays in `awk`], page 135, covers `awk`'s one-and-only data structure: associative arrays. Deleting array elements and whole arrays is also described, as well as sorting arrays in `gawk`. It also describes how `gawk` provides arrays of arrays.

Chapter 9 [Functions], page 147, describes the built-in functions `awk` and `gawk` provide, as well as how to define your own functions.

Chapter 10 [Internationalization with `gawk`], page 185, describes special features in `gawk` for translating program messages into different languages at runtime.

Chapter 11 [Advanced Features of `gawk`], page 195, describes a number of `gawk`-specific advanced features. Of particular note are the abilities to have two-way communications with another process, perform TCP/IP networking, and profile your `awk` programs.

Chapter 12 [A Library of `awk` Functions], page 211, and Chapter 13 [Practical `awk` Programs], page 241, provide many sample `awk` programs. Reading them allows you to see `awk` solving real problems.

Chapter 14 [`dgawk`: The `awk` Debugger], page 285, describes the `awk` debugger, `dgawk`.

Appendix A [The Evolution of the `awk` Language], page 301, describes how the `awk` language has evolved since its first release to present. It also describes how `gawk` has acquired features over time.

Appendix B [Installing `gawk`], page 309, describes how to get `gawk`, how to compile it on POSIX-compatible systems, and how to compile and use it on different non-POSIX systems. It also describes how to report bugs in `gawk` and where to get other freely available `awk` implementations.

Appendix C [Implementation Notes], page 325, describes how to disable `gawk`'s extensions, as well as how to contribute new code to `gawk`, how to write extension libraries, and some possible future directions for `gawk` development.

Appendix D [Basic Programming Concepts], page 341, provides some very cursory background material for those who are completely unfamiliar with computer programming. Also centralized there is a discussion of some of the issues surrounding floating-point numbers.

The [Glossary], page 347, defines most, if not all, the significant terms used throughout the book. If you find terms that you aren't familiar with, try looking them up here.

[GNU General Public License], page 357, and [GNU Free Documentation License], page 369, present the licenses that cover the `gawk` source code and this book, respectively.

## Typographical Conventions

This book is written in `Texinfo`, the GNU documentation formatting language. A single `Texinfo` source file is used to produce both the printed and online versions of the documentation. Because of this, the typographical conventions are slightly different than in other books you may have read.

Examples you would type at the command-line are preceded by the common shell primary and secondary prompts, '\$' and '>'. Input that you type is shown *like this*. Output from the command is preceded by the glyph “←”. This typically represents the command's

standard output. Error messages, and other output on the command’s standard error, are preceded by the glyph “`error`”. For example:

```
$ echo hi on stdout
+ hi on stdout
$ echo hello on stderr 1>&2
error hello on stderr
```

In the text, command names appear in **this font**, while code segments appear in the same font and quoted, ‘*like this*’. Options look like this: ‘-f’. Some things are emphasized *like this*, and if a point needs to be made strongly, it is done **like this**. The first occurrence of a new term is usually its *definition* and appears in the same font as the previous occurrence of “definition” in this sentence. Finally, file names are indicated like this: ‘/path/to/ourfile’.

Characters that you type at the keyboard look *like this*. In particular, there are special characters called “control characters.” These are characters that you type by holding down both the *CONTROL* key and another key, at the same time. For example, a *Ctrl-d* is typed by first pressing and holding the *CONTROL* key, next pressing the *d* key and finally releasing both keys.

## Dark Corners

*Dark corners are basically fractal — no matter how much you illuminate, there’s always a smaller but darker one.*

Brian Kernighan

Until the POSIX standard (and *GAWK: Effective AWK Programming*), many features of `awk` were either poorly documented or not documented at all. Descriptions of such features (often called “dark corners”) are noted in this book with the picture of a flashlight in the margin, as shown here. They also appear in the index under the heading “dark corner.”



As noted by the opening quote, though, any coverage of dark corners is, by definition, incomplete.

Extensions to the standard `awk` language that are supported by more than one `awk` implementation are marked “(c.e.),” and listed in the index under “common extensions” and “extensions, common.”

## The GNU Project and This Book

The Free Software Foundation (FSF) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the production and distribution of freely distributable software. It was founded by Richard M. Stallman, the author of the original Emacs editor. GNU Emacs is the most widely used version of Emacs today.

The GNU<sup>5</sup> Project is an ongoing effort on the part of the Free Software Foundation to create a complete, freely distributable, POSIX-compliant computing environment. The FSF uses the “GNU General Public License” (GPL) to ensure that their software’s source code is always available to the end user. A copy of the GPL is included in this book for your reference (see [\[GNU General Public License\]](#), page 357). The GPL applies to the C language source code for `gawk`. To find out more about the FSF and the GNU Project online, see [the GNU Project’s home page](#). This book may also be read from [their web site](#).

<sup>5</sup> GNU stands for “GNU’s not Unix.”

## 8 GAWK: Effective AWK Programming

A shell, an editor (Emacs), highly portable optimizing C, C++, and Objective-C compilers, a symbolic debugger and dozens of large and small utilities (such as `gawk`), have all been completed and are freely available. The GNU operating system kernel (the HURD), has been released but remains in an early stage of development.

Until the GNU operating system is more fully developed, you should consider using GNU/Linux, a freely distributable, Unix-like operating system for Intel<sup>®</sup>, Power Architecture, Sun SPARC, IBM S/390, and other systems.<sup>6</sup> Many GNU/Linux distributions are available for download from the Internet.

(There are numerous other freely available, Unix-like operating systems based on the Berkeley Software Distribution, and some of them use recent versions of `gawk` for their versions of `awk`. [NetBSD](#), [FreeBSD](#), and [OpenBSD](#) are three of the most popular ones, but there are others.)

The book you are reading is actually free—at least, the information in it is free to anyone. The machine-readable source code for the book comes with `gawk`; anyone may take this book to a copying machine and make as many copies as they like. (Take a moment to check the Free Documentation License in [\[GNU Free Documentation License\]](#), page 369.)

The book itself has gone through a number of previous editions. Paul Rubin wrote the very first draft of *The GAWK Manual*; it was around 40 pages in size. Diane Close and Richard Stallman improved it, yielding a version that was around 90 pages long and barely described the original, “old” version of `awk`.

I started working with that version in the fall of 1988. As work on it progressed, the FSF published several preliminary versions (numbered 0.x). In 1996, Edition 1.0 was released with `gawk` 3.0.0. The FSF published the first two editions under the title *The GNU Awk User's Guide*.

This edition maintains the basic structure of the previous editions. For Edition 4.0, the content has been thoroughly reviewed and updated. All references to versions prior to 4.0 have been removed. Of significant note for this edition is [Chapter 14 \[dgawk: The awk Debugger\]](#), page 285.

*GAWK: Effective AWK Programming* will undoubtedly continue to evolve. An electronic version comes with the `gawk` distribution from the FSF. If you find an error in this book, please report it! See [Section B.4 \[Reporting Problems and Bugs\]](#), page 320, for information on submitting problem reports electronically.

### How to Contribute

As the maintainer of GNU `awk`, I once thought that I would be able to manage a collection of publicly available `awk` programs and I even solicited contributions. Making things available on the Internet helps keep the `gawk` distribution down to manageable size.

The initial collection of material, such as it is, is still available at <ftp://ftp.freefriends.org/arnold/Awkstuff>. In the hopes of doing something more broad, I acquired the `awk.info` domain.

However, I found that I could not dedicate enough time to managing contributed code: the archive did not grow and the domain went unused for several years.

---

<sup>6</sup> The terminology “GNU/Linux” is explained in the [\[Glossary\]](#), page 347.

Fortunately, late in 2008, a volunteer took on the task of setting up an `awk`-related web site—<http://awk.info>—and did a very nice job.

If you have written an interesting `awk` program, or have written a `gawk` extension that you would like to share with the rest of the world, please see <http://awk.info/?contribute> for how to contribute it to the web site.

## Acknowledgments

The initial draft of *The GAWK Manual* had the following acknowledgments:

Many people need to be thanked for their assistance in producing this manual. Jay Fenlason contributed many ideas and sample programs. Richard Mlynarik and Robert Chassell gave helpful comments on drafts of this manual. The paper *A Supplemental Document for awk* by John W. Pierce of the Chemistry Department at UC San Diego, pinpointed several issues relevant both to `awk` implementation and to this manual, that would otherwise have escaped us.

I would like to acknowledge Richard M. Stallman, for his vision of a better world and for his courage in founding the FSF and starting the GNU Project.

Earlier editions of this book had the following acknowledgements:

The following people (in alphabetical order) provided helpful comments on various versions of this book, Rick Adams, Dr. Nelson H.F. Beebe, Karl Berry, Dr. Michael Brennan, Rich Burrige, Claire Cloutier, Diane Close, Scott Deifik, Christopher (“Topher”) Eliot, Jeffrey Friedl, Dr. Darrel Hankerson, Michal Jaegermann, Dr. Richard J. LeBlanc, Michael Lijewski, Pat Rankin, Miriam Robbins, Mary Sheehan, and Chuck Toporek.

Robert J. Chassell provided much valuable advice on the use of Texinfo. He also deserves special thanks for convincing me *not* to title this book *How To Gawk Politely*. Karl Berry helped significantly with the  $\TeX$  part of Texinfo.

I would like to thank Marshall and Elaine Hartholz of Seattle and Dr. Bert and Rita Schreiber of Detroit for large amounts of quiet vacation time in their homes, which allowed me to make significant progress on this book and on `gawk` itself.

Phil Hughes of SSC contributed in a very important way by loaning me his laptop GNU/Linux system, not once, but twice, which allowed me to do a lot of work while away from home.

David Trueman deserves special credit; he has done a yeoman job of evolving `gawk` so that it performs well and without bugs. Although he is no longer involved with `gawk`, working with him on this project was a significant pleasure.

The intrepid members of the GNITS mailing list, and most notably Ulrich Drepper, provided invaluable help and feedback for the design of the internationalization features.

Chuck Toporek, Mary Sheehan, and Claire Coutier of O’Reilly & Associates contributed significant editorial help for this book for the 3.1 release of `gawk`.

Dr. Nelson Beebe, Andreas Buening, Antonio Colombo, Stephen Davies, Scott Deifik, John H. DuBois III, Darrel Hankerson, Michal Jaegermann, Jürgen Kahrs, Dave Pitts, Stepan Kasal, Pat Rankin, Andrew Schorr, Corinna Vinschen, Anders Wallin, and Eli

Zaretskii (in alphabetical order) make up the current `gawk` “crack portability team.” Without their hard work and help, `gawk` would not be nearly the fine program it is today. It has been and continues to be a pleasure working with this team of fine people.

John Haque contributed the modifications to convert `gawk` into a byte-code interpreter, including the debugger. Stephen Davies contributed to the effort to bring the byte-code changes into the mainstream code base. Efraim Yawitz contributed the initial text of [Chapter 14 \[dgawk: The awk Debugger\]](#), page 285.

I would like to thank Brian Kernighan for invaluable assistance during the testing and debugging of `gawk`, and for ongoing help and advice in clarifying numerous points about the language. We could not have done nearly as good a job on either `gawk` or its documentation without his help.

I must thank my wonderful wife, Miriam, for her patience through the many versions of this project, for her proofreading, and for sharing me with the computer. I would like to thank my parents for their love, and for the grace with which they raised and educated me. Finally, I also must acknowledge my gratitude to G-d, for the many opportunities He has sent my way, as well as for the gifts He has given me with which to take advantage of those opportunities.

Arnold Robbins  
Nof Ayalon  
ISRAEL  
March, 2011

# 1 Getting Started with awk

The basic function of `awk` is to search files for lines (or other units of text) that contain certain patterns. When a line matches one of the patterns, `awk` performs specified actions on that line. `awk` keeps processing input lines in this way until it reaches the end of the input files.

Programs in `awk` are different from programs in most other languages, because `awk` programs are *data-driven*; that is, you describe the data you want to work with and then what to do when you find it. Most other languages are *procedural*; you have to describe, in great detail, every step the program is to take. When working with procedural languages, it is usually much harder to clearly describe the data your program will process. For this reason, `awk` programs are often refreshingly easy to read and write.

When you run `awk`, you specify an `awk` program that tells `awk` what to do. The program consists of a series of *rules*. (It may also contain *function definitions*, an advanced feature that we will ignore for now. See [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170.) Each rule specifies one pattern to search for and one action to perform upon finding the pattern.

Syntactically, a rule consists of a pattern followed by an action. The action is enclosed in curly braces to separate it from the pattern. Newlines usually separate rules. Therefore, an `awk` program looks like this:

```
pattern { action }
pattern { action }
...
```

## 1.1 How to Run awk Programs

There are several ways to run an `awk` program. If the program is short, it is easiest to include it in the command that runs `awk`, like this:

```
awk 'program' input-file1 input-file2 ...
```

When the program is long, it is usually more convenient to put it in a file and run it with a command like this:

```
awk -f program-file input-file1 input-file2 ...
```

This section discusses both mechanisms, along with several variations of each.

### 1.1.1 One-Shot Throwaway awk Programs

Once you are familiar with `awk`, you will often type in simple programs the moment you want to use them. Then you can write the program as the first argument of the `awk` command, like this:

```
awk 'program' input-file1 input-file2 ...
```

where *program* consists of a series of *patterns* and *actions*, as described earlier.

This command format instructs the *shell*, or command interpreter, to start `awk` and use the *program* to process records in the input file(s). There are single quotes around *program* so the shell won't interpret any `awk` characters as special shell characters. The quotes also cause the shell to treat all of *program* as a single argument for `awk`, and allow *program* to be more than one line long.

This format is also useful for running short or medium-sized `awk` programs from shell scripts, because it avoids the need for a separate file for the `awk` program. A self-contained shell script is more reliable because there are no other files to misplace.

Section 1.3 [Some Simple Examples], page 17, later in this chapter, presents several short, self-contained programs.

### 1.1.2 Running `awk` Without Input Files

You can also run `awk` without any input files. If you type the following command line:

```
awk 'program'
```

`awk` applies the *program* to the *standard input*, which usually means whatever you type on the terminal. This continues until you indicate end-of-file by typing `Ctrl-d`. (On other operating systems, the end-of-file character may be different. For example, on OS/2, it is `Ctrl-z`.)

As an example, the following program prints a friendly piece of advice (from Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*), to keep you from worrying about the complexities of computer programming<sup>1</sup> (`BEGIN` is a feature we haven't discussed yet):

```
$ awk "BEGIN { print \"Don't Panic!\" }"
+ Don't Panic!
```

This program does not read any input. The `'\'` before each of the inner double quotes is necessary because of the shell's quoting rules—in particular because it mixes both single quotes and double quotes.<sup>2</sup>

This next simple `awk` program emulates the `cat` utility; it copies whatever you type on the keyboard to its standard output (why this works is explained shortly).

```
$ awk '{ print }'
Now is the time for all good men
+ Now is the time for all good men
to come to the aid of their country.
+ to come to the aid of their country.
Four score and seven years ago, ...
+ Four score and seven years ago, ...
What, me worry?
+ What, me worry?
Ctrl-d
```

### 1.1.3 Running Long Programs

Sometimes your `awk` programs can be very long. In this case, it is more convenient to put the program into a separate file. In order to tell `awk` to use that file for its program, you type:

```
awk -f source-file input-file1 input-file2 ...
```

<sup>1</sup> If you use Bash as your shell, you should execute the command `'set +H'` before running this program interactively, to disable the C shell-style command history, which treats `'!'` as a special character. We recommend putting this command into your personal startup file.

<sup>2</sup> Although we generally recommend the use of single quotes around the program text, double quotes are needed here in order to put the single quote into the message.

The `-f` instructs the `awk` utility to get the `awk` program from the file *source-file*. Any file name can be used for *source-file*. For example, you could put the program:

```
BEGIN { print "Don't Panic!" }
```

into the file `advice`. Then this command:

```
awk -f advice
```

does the same thing as this one:

```
awk "BEGIN { print \"Don't Panic!\" }"
```

This was explained earlier (see [Section 1.1.2 \[Running awk Without Input Files\]](#), page 12). Note that you don't usually need single quotes around the file name that you specify with `-f`, because most file names don't contain any of the shell's special characters. Notice that in `advice`, the `awk` program did not have single quotes around it. The quotes are only needed for programs that are provided on the `awk` command line.

If you want to clearly identify your `awk` program files as such, you can add the extension `.awk` to the file name. This doesn't affect the execution of the `awk` program but it does make "housekeeping" easier.

### 1.1.4 Executable awk Programs

Once you have learned `awk`, you may want to write self-contained `awk` scripts, using the `#!` script mechanism. You can do this on many systems.<sup>3</sup> For example, you could update the file `advice` to look like this:

```
#! /bin/awk -f
```

```
BEGIN { print "Don't Panic!" }
```

After making this file executable (with the `chmod` utility), simply type `advice` at the shell and the system arranges to run `awk`<sup>4</sup> as if you had typed `awk -f advice`:

```
$ chmod +x advice
```

```
$ advice
```

```
→ Don't Panic!
```

(We assume you have the current directory in your shell's search path variable [typically `$PATH`]. If not, you may need to type `./advice` at the shell.)

Self-contained `awk` scripts are useful when you want to write a program that users can invoke without their having to know that the program is written in `awk`.

### Advanced Notes: Portability Issues with `#!`

Some systems limit the length of the interpreter name to 32 characters. Often, this can be dealt with by using a symbolic link.

You should not put more than one argument on the `#!` line after the path to `awk`. It does not work. The operating system treats the rest of the line as a single argument and

<sup>3</sup> The `#!` mechanism works on GNU/Linux systems, BSD-based systems and commercial Unix systems.

<sup>4</sup> The line beginning with `#!` lists the full file name of an interpreter to run and an optional initial command-line argument to pass to that interpreter. The operating system then runs the interpreter with the given argument and the full argument list of the executed program. The first argument in the list is the full file name of the `awk` program. The rest of the argument list contains either options to `awk`, or data files, or both.

passes it to `awk`. Doing this leads to confusing behavior—most likely a usage diagnostic of some sort from `awk`.

Finally, the value of `ARGV[0]` (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\], page 126](#)) varies depending upon your operating system. Some systems put `'awk'` there, some put the full pathname of `awk` (such as `'/bin/awk'`), and some put the name of your script (`'advice'`). Don't rely on the value of `ARGV[0]` to provide your script name.



### 1.1.5 Comments in `awk` Programs

A *comment* is some text that is included in a program for the sake of human readers; it is not really an executable part of the program. Comments can explain what the program does and how it works. Nearly all programming languages have provisions for comments, as programs are typically hard to understand without them.

In the `awk` language, a comment starts with the sharp sign character (`'#'`) and continues to the end of the line. The `'#'` does not have to be the first character on the line. The `awk` language ignores the rest of a line following a sharp sign. For example, we could have put the following into `'advice'`:

```
# This program prints a nice friendly message.  It helps
# keep novice users from being afraid of the computer.
BEGIN    { print "Don't Panic!" }
```

You can put comment lines into keyboard-composed throwaway `awk` programs, but this usually isn't very useful; the purpose of a comment is to help you or another person understand the program when reading it at a later time.

**CAUTION:** As mentioned in [Section 1.1.1 \[One-Shot Throwaway `awk` Programs\], page 11](#), you can enclose small to medium programs in single quotes, in order to keep your shell scripts self-contained. When doing so, *don't* put an apostrophe (i.e., a single quote) into a comment (or anywhere else in your program). The shell interprets the quote as the closing quote for the entire program. As a result, usually the shell prints a message about mismatched quotes, and if `awk` actually runs, it will probably print strange messages about syntax errors. For example, look at the following:

```
$ awk '{ print "hello" } # let's be cute'
>
```

The shell sees that the first two quotes match, and that a new quoted object begins at the end of the command line. It therefore prompts with the secondary prompt, waiting for more input. With Unix `awk`, closing the quoted string produces this result:

```
$ awk '{ print "hello" } # let's be cute'
> '
[error] awk: can't open file be
[error] source line number 1
```

Putting a backslash before the single quote in `'let's'` wouldn't help, since backslashes are not special inside single quotes. The next subsection describes the shell's quoting rules.

### 1.1.6 Shell-Quoting Issues

For short to medium length `awk` programs, it is most convenient to enter the program on the `awk` command line. This is best done by enclosing the entire program in single quotes. This is true whether you are entering the program interactively at the shell prompt, or writing it as part of a larger shell script:

```
awk 'program text' input-file1 input-file2 ...
```

Once you are working with the shell, it is helpful to have a basic knowledge of shell quoting rules. The following rules apply only to POSIX-compliant, Bourne-style shells (such as Bash, the GNU Bourne-Again Shell). If you use the C shell, you're on your own.

- Quoted items can be concatenated with nonquoted items as well as with other quoted items. The shell turns everything into one argument for the command.
- Preceding any single character with a backslash (`\`) quotes that character. The shell removes the backslash and passes the quoted character on to the command.
- Single quotes protect everything between the opening and closing quotes. The shell does no interpretation of the quoted text, passing it on verbatim to the command. It is *impossible* to embed a single quote inside single-quoted text. Refer back to [Section 1.1.5 \[Comments in `awk` Programs\]](#), page 14, for an example of what happens if you try.
- Double quotes protect most things between the opening and closing quotes. The shell does at least variable and command substitution on the quoted text. Different shells may do additional kinds of processing on double-quoted text.

Since certain characters within double-quoted text are processed by the shell, they must be *escaped* within the text. Of note are the characters `$`, `'`, `\`, and `"`, all of which must be preceded by a backslash within double-quoted text if they are to be passed on literally to the program. (The leading backslash is stripped first.) Thus, the example seen previously in [Section 1.1.2 \[Running `awk` Without Input Files\]](#), page 12, is applicable:

```
$ awk "BEGIN { print \"Don't Panic!\" }"
└─ Don't Panic!
```

Note that the single quote is not special within double quotes.

- Null strings are removed when they occur as part of a non-null command-line argument, while explicit non-null objects are kept. For example, to specify that the field separator FS should be set to the null string, use:

```
awk -F "" 'program' files # correct
```

Don't use this:

```
awk -F"" 'program' files # wrong!
```

In the second case, `awk` will attempt to use the text of the program as the value of FS, and the first file name as the text of the program! This results in syntax errors at best, and confusing behavior at worst.

Mixing single and double quotes is difficult. You have to resort to shell quoting tricks, like this:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { print "Here is a single quote <'>" }'
└─ Here is a single quote <'>
```

This program consists of three concatenated quoted strings. The first and the third are single-quoted, the second is double-quoted.

This can be “simplified” to:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { print "Here is a single quote <'\''>" }'
→ Here is a single quote <'>
```

Judge for yourself which of these two is the more readable.

Another option is to use double quotes, escaping the embedded, `awk`-level double quotes:

```
$ awk "BEGIN { print \"Here is a single quote <'>\" }"
→ Here is a single quote <'>
```

This option is also painful, because double quotes, backslashes, and dollar signs are very common in more advanced `awk` programs.

A third option is to use the octal escape sequence equivalents (see [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\], page 38](#)) for the single- and double-quote characters, like so:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { print "Here is a single quote <\47>" }'
→ Here is a single quote <'>
$ awk 'BEGIN { print "Here is a double quote <\42>" }'
→ Here is a double quote <">
```

This works nicely, except that you should comment clearly what the escapes mean.

A fourth option is to use command-line variable assignment, like this:

```
$ awk -v sq="'" 'BEGIN { print "Here is a single quote <" sq ">" }'
→ Here is a single quote <'>
```

If you really need both single and double quotes in your `awk` program, it is probably best to move it into a separate file, where the shell won’t be part of the picture, and you can say what you mean.

### 1.1.6.1 Quoting in MS-Windows Batch Files

Although this book generally only worries about POSIX systems and the POSIX shell, the following issue arises often enough for many users that it is worth addressing.

The “shells” on Microsoft Windows systems use the double-quote character for quoting, and make it difficult or impossible to include an escaped double-quote character in a command-line script. The following example, courtesy of Jeroen Brink, shows how to print all lines in a file surrounded by double quotes:

```
gawk "{ print \"\042\" $0 \"\042\" }" file
```

## 1.2 Data Files for the Examples

Many of the examples in this book take their input from two sample data files. The first, ‘`BBS-list`’, represents a list of computer bulletin board systems together with information about those systems. The second data file, called ‘`inventory-shipped`’, contains information about monthly shipments. In both files, each line is considered to be one *record*.

In the data file ‘`BBS-list`’, each record contains the name of a computer bulletin board, its phone number, the board’s baud rate(s), and a code for the number of hours it is operational. An ‘`A`’ in the last column means the board operates 24 hours a day. A ‘`B`’ in the last column means the board only operates on evening and weekend hours. A ‘`C`’ means the board operates only on weekends:

aardvark	555-5553	1200/300	B
alpo-net	555-3412	2400/1200/300	A
barfly	555-7685	1200/300	A
bites	555-1675	2400/1200/300	A
camelot	555-0542	300	C
core	555-2912	1200/300	C
fooy	555-1234	2400/1200/300	B
foot	555-6699	1200/300	B
macfoo	555-6480	1200/300	A
sdace	555-3430	2400/1200/300	A
sabafoo	555-2127	1200/300	C

The data file ‘inventory-shipped’ represents information about shipments during the year. Each record contains the month, the number of green crates shipped, the number of red boxes shipped, the number of orange bags shipped, and the number of blue packages shipped, respectively. There are 16 entries, covering the 12 months of last year and the first four months of the current year.

Jan	13	25	15	115
Feb	15	32	24	226
Mar	15	24	34	228
Apr	31	52	63	420
May	16	34	29	208
Jun	31	42	75	492
Jul	24	34	67	436
Aug	15	34	47	316
Sep	13	55	37	277
Oct	29	54	68	525
Nov	20	87	82	577
Dec	17	35	61	401
Jan	21	36	64	620
Feb	26	58	80	652
Mar	24	75	70	495
Apr	21	70	74	514

### 1.3 Some Simple Examples

The following command runs a simple `awk` program that searches the input file ‘BBS-list’ for the character string ‘foo’ (a grouping of characters is usually called a *string*; the term *string* is based on similar usage in English, such as “a string of pearls,” or “a string of cars in a train”):

```
awk '/foo/ { print $0 }' BBS-list
```

When lines containing ‘foo’ are found, they are printed because ‘`print $0`’ means print the current line. (Just ‘`print`’ by itself means the same thing, so we could have written that instead.)

You will notice that slashes (‘/’) surround the string ‘foo’ in the `awk` program. The slashes indicate that ‘foo’ is the pattern to search for. This type of pattern is called a *regular*

expression, which is covered in more detail later (see [Chapter 3 \[Regular Expressions\]](#), [page 37](#)). The pattern is allowed to match parts of words. There are single quotes around the `awk` program so that the shell won't interpret any of it as special shell characters.

Here is what this program prints:

```
$ awk '/foo/ { print $0 }' BBS-list
+ fooy          555-1234      2400/1200/300    B
+ foot          555-6699      1200/300         B
+ macfoo        555-6480      1200/300         A
+ sabafoo       555-2127      1200/300         C
```

In an `awk` rule, either the pattern or the action can be omitted, but not both. If the pattern is omitted, then the action is performed for *every* input line. If the action is omitted, the default action is to print all lines that match the pattern.

Thus, we could leave out the action (the `print` statement and the curly braces) in the previous example and the result would be the same: `awk` prints all lines matching the pattern `'foo'`. By comparison, omitting the `print` statement but retaining the curly braces makes an empty action that does nothing (i.e., no lines are printed).

Many practical `awk` programs are just a line or two. Following is a collection of useful, short programs to get you started. Some of these programs contain constructs that haven't been covered yet. (The description of the program will give you a good idea of what is going on, but please read the rest of the book to become an `awk` expert!) Most of the examples use a data file named `'data'`. This is just a placeholder; if you use these programs yourself, substitute your own file names for `'data'`. For future reference, note that there is often more than one way to do things in `awk`. At some point, you may want to look back at these examples and see if you can come up with different ways to do the same things shown here:

- Print the length of the longest input line:

```
awk '{ if (length($0) > max) max = length($0) }
     END { print max }' data
```

- Print every line that is longer than 80 characters:

```
awk 'length($0) > 80' data
```

The sole rule has a relational expression as its pattern and it has no action—so the default action, printing the record, is used.

- Print the length of the longest line in `'data'`:

```
expand data | awk '{ if (x < length()) x = length() }
                 END { print "maximum line length is " x }'
```

The input is processed by the `expand` utility to change TABs into spaces, so the widths compared are actually the right-margin columns.

- Print every line that has at least one field:

```
awk 'NF > 0' data
```

This is an easy way to delete blank lines from a file (or rather, to create a new file similar to the old file but from which the blank lines have been removed).

- Print seven random numbers from 0 to 100, inclusive:

```
awk 'BEGIN { for (i = 1; i <= 7; i++)
              print int(101 * rand()) }'
```

- Print the total number of bytes used by *files*:

```
ls -l files | awk '{ x += $5 }
                END { print "total bytes: " x }'
```

- Print the total number of kilobytes used by *files*:

```
ls -l files | awk '{ x += $5 }
                END { print "total K-bytes:", x / 1024 }'
```

- Print a sorted list of the login names of all users:

```
awk -F: '{ print $1 }' /etc/passwd | sort
```

- Count the lines in a file:

```
awk 'END { print NR }' data
```

- Print the even-numbered lines in the data file:

```
awk 'NR % 2 == 0' data
```

If you use the expression `'NR % 2 == 1'` instead, the program would print the odd-numbered lines.

## 1.4 An Example with Two Rules

The `awk` utility reads the input files one line at a time. For each line, `awk` tries the patterns of each of the rules. If several patterns match, then several actions are run in the order in which they appear in the `awk` program. If no patterns match, then no actions are run.

After processing all the rules that match the line (and perhaps there are none), `awk` reads the next line. (However, see [Section 7.4.8 \[The next Statement\]](#), page 124, and also see [Section 7.4.9 \[Using gawk's nextfile Statement\]](#), page 125). This continues until the program reaches the end of the file. For example, the following `awk` program contains two rules:

```
/12/ { print $0 }
/21/ { print $0 }
```

The first rule has the string `'12'` as the pattern and `'print $0'` as the action. The second rule has the string `'21'` as the pattern and also has `'print $0'` as the action. Each rule's action is enclosed in its own pair of braces.

This program prints every line that contains the string `'12'` or the string `'21'`. If a line contains both strings, it is printed twice, once by each rule.

This is what happens if we run this program on our two sample data files, `'BBS-list'` and `'inventory-shipped'`:

```
$ awk '/12/ { print $0 }
>      /21/ { print $0 }' BBS-list inventory-shipped
+ aardvark      555-5553      1200/300      B
+ alpo-net      555-3412      2400/1200/300 A
+ barfly        555-7685      1200/300      A
+ bites         555-1675      2400/1200/300 A
+ core          555-2912      1200/300      C
+ foey          555-1234      2400/1200/300 B
+ foot          555-6699      1200/300      B
+ macfoo        555-6480      1200/300      A
```

```

+ sdace          555-3430      2400/1200/300    A
+ sabafoo        555-2127      1200/300         C
+ sabafoo        555-2127      1200/300         C
+ Jan  21  36  64 620
+ Apr   21  70  74 514

```

Note how the line beginning with ‘sabafoo’ in ‘BBS-list’ was printed twice, once for each rule.

## 1.5 A More Complex Example

Now that we’ve mastered some simple tasks, let’s look at what typical `awk` programs do. This example shows how `awk` can be used to summarize, select, and rearrange the output of another utility. It uses features that haven’t been covered yet, so don’t worry if you don’t understand all the details:

```

LC_ALL=C ls -l | awk '$6 == "Nov" { sum += $5 }
                END { print sum }'

```

This command prints the total number of bytes in all the files in the current directory that were last modified in November (of any year). The ‘`ls -l`’ part of this example is a system command that gives you a listing of the files in a directory, including each file’s size and the date the file was last modified. Its output looks like this:

```

-rw-r--r--  1 arnold  user   1933 Nov  7 13:05 Makefile
-rw-r--r--  1 arnold  user  10809 Nov  7 13:03 awk.h
-rw-r--r--  1 arnold  user   983 Apr 13 12:14 awk.tab.h
-rw-r--r--  1 arnold  user  31869 Jun 15 12:20 awkgram.y
-rw-r--r--  1 arnold  user  22414 Nov  7 13:03 awk1.c
-rw-r--r--  1 arnold  user  37455 Nov  7 13:03 awk2.c
-rw-r--r--  1 arnold  user  27511 Dec  9 13:07 awk3.c
-rw-r--r--  1 arnold  user   7989 Nov  7 13:03 awk4.c

```

The first field contains read-write permissions, the second field contains the number of links to the file, and the third field identifies the owner of the file. The fourth field identifies the group of the file. The fifth field contains the size of the file in bytes. The sixth, seventh, and eighth fields contain the month, day, and time, respectively, that the file was last modified. Finally, the ninth field contains the file name.<sup>5</sup>

The ‘`$6 == "Nov"`’ in our `awk` program is an expression that tests whether the sixth field of the output from ‘`ls -l`’ matches the string ‘Nov’. Each time a line has the string ‘Nov’ for its sixth field, the action ‘`sum += $5`’ is performed. This adds the fifth field (the file’s size) to the variable `sum`. As a result, when `awk` has finished reading all the input lines, `sum` is the total of the sizes of the files whose lines matched the pattern. (This works because `awk` variables are automatically initialized to zero.)

After the last line of output from `ls` has been processed, the `END` rule executes and prints the value of `sum`. In this example, the value of `sum` is 80600.

These more advanced `awk` techniques are covered in later sections (see [Section 7.3 \[Actions\]](#), page 117). Before you can move on to more advanced `awk` programming, you have to

<sup>5</sup> The ‘`LC_ALL=C`’ is needed to produce this traditional-style output from `ls`.

know how `awk` interprets your input and displays your output. By manipulating fields and using `print` statements, you can produce some very useful and impressive-looking reports.

## 1.6 awk Statements Versus Lines

Most often, each line in an `awk` program is a separate statement or separate rule, like this:

```
awk '/12/ { print $0 }
     /21/ { print $0 }' BBS-list inventory-shipped
```

However, `gawk` ignores newlines after any of the following symbols and keywords:

```
, { ? : || && do else
```

A newline at any other point is considered the end of the statement.<sup>6</sup>

If you would like to split a single statement into two lines at a point where a newline would terminate it, you can *continue* it by ending the first line with a backslash character (`\`). The backslash must be the final character on the line in order to be recognized as a continuation character. A backslash is allowed anywhere in the statement, even in the middle of a string or regular expression. For example:

```
awk '/This regular expression is too long, so continue it\
    on the next line/ { print $1 }'
```

We have generally not used backslash continuation in our sample programs. `gawk` places no limit on the length of a line, so backslash continuation is never strictly necessary; it just makes programs more readable. For this same reason, as well as for clarity, we have kept most statements short in the sample programs presented throughout the book. Backslash continuation is most useful when your `awk` program is in a separate source file instead of entered from the command line. You should also note that many `awk` implementations are more particular about where you may use backslash continuation. For example, they may not allow you to split a string constant using backslash continuation. Thus, for maximum portability of your `awk` programs, it is best not to split your lines in the middle of a regular expression or a string.

**CAUTION:** *Backslash continuation does not work as described with the C shell.*

It works for `awk` programs in files and for one-shot programs, *provided* you are using a POSIX-compliant shell, such as the Unix Bourne shell or Bash. But the C shell behaves differently! There, you must use two backslashes in a row, followed by a newline. Note also that when using the C shell, *every* newline in your `awk` program must be escaped with a backslash. To illustrate:

```
% awk 'BEGIN { \
?     print \\
?           "hello, world" \
? }'
+ hello, world
```

Here, the `%` and `?` are the C shell's primary and secondary prompts, analogous to the standard shell's `$` and `>`.

Compare the previous example to how it is done with a POSIX-compliant shell:

<sup>6</sup> The `'?` and `:'` referred to here is the three-operand conditional expression described in [Section 6.3.4 \[Conditional Expressions\]](#), page 107. Splitting lines after `'?` and `:'` is a minor `gawk` extension; if `'--posix'` is specified (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), then this extension is disabled.

```
$ awk 'BEGIN {
>   print \
>       "hello, world"
> }'
-| hello, world
```

`awk` is a line-oriented language. Each rule's action has to begin on the same line as the pattern. To have the pattern and action on separate lines, you *must* use backslash continuation; there is no other option.

Another thing to keep in mind is that backslash continuation and comments do not mix. As soon as `awk` sees the '#' that starts a comment, it ignores *everything* on the rest of the line. For example:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { print "dont panic" # a friendly \
>                                     BEGIN rule
> }'
[error] gawk: cmd. line:2:          BEGIN rule
[error] gawk: cmd. line:2:          ^ parse error
```

In this case, it looks like the backslash would continue the comment onto the next line. However, the backslash-newline combination is never even noticed because it is “hidden” inside the comment. Thus, the `BEGIN` is noted as a syntax error.

When `awk` statements within one rule are short, you might want to put more than one of them on a line. This is accomplished by separating the statements with a semicolon (;). This also applies to the rules themselves. Thus, the program shown at the start of this section could also be written this way:

```
/12/ { print $0 } ; /21/ { print $0 }
```

**NOTE:** The requirement that states that rules on the same line must be separated with a semicolon was not in the original `awk` language; it was added for consistency with the treatment of statements within an action.

## 1.7 Other Features of `awk`

The `awk` language provides a number of predefined, or *built-in*, variables that your programs can use to get information from `awk`. There are other variables your program can set as well to control how `awk` processes your data.

In addition, `awk` provides a number of built-in functions for doing common computational and string-related operations. `gawk` provides built-in functions for working with timestamps, performing bit manipulation, for runtime string translation (internationalization), determining the type of a variable, and array sorting.

As we develop our presentation of the `awk` language, we introduce most of the variables and many of the functions. They are described systematically in [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126, and [Section 9.1 \[Built-in Functions\]](#), page 147.

## 1.8 When to Use `awk`

Now that you've seen some of what `awk` can do, you might wonder how `awk` could be useful for you. By using utility programs, advanced patterns, field separators, arithmetic statements, and other selection criteria, you can produce much more complex output. The

`awk` language is very useful for producing reports from large amounts of raw data, such as summarizing information from the output of other utility programs like `ls`. (See [Section 1.5 \[A More Complex Example\]](#), page 20.)

Programs written with `awk` are usually much smaller than they would be in other languages. This makes `awk` programs easy to compose and use. Often, `awk` programs can be quickly composed at your keyboard, used once, and thrown away. Because `awk` programs are interpreted, you can avoid the (usually lengthy) compilation part of the typical edit-compile-test-debug cycle of software development.

Complex programs have been written in `awk`, including a complete retargetable assembler for eight-bit microprocessors (see [\[Glossary\]](#), page 347, for more information), and a microcode assembler for a special-purpose Prolog computer. While the original `awk`'s capabilities were strained by tasks of such complexity, modern versions are more capable. Even Brian Kernighan's version of `awk` has fewer predefined limits, and those that it has are much larger than they used to be.

If you find yourself writing `awk` scripts of more than, say, a few hundred lines, you might consider using a different programming language. Emacs Lisp is a good choice if you need sophisticated string or pattern matching capabilities. The shell is also good at string and pattern matching; in addition, it allows powerful use of the system utilities. More conventional languages, such as C, C++, and Java, offer better facilities for system programming and for managing the complexity of large programs. Programs in these languages may require more lines of source code than the equivalent `awk` programs, but they are easier to maintain and usually run more efficiently.



## 2 Running awk and gawk

This chapter covers how to run `awk`, both POSIX-standard and `gawk`-specific command-line options, and what `awk` and `gawk` do with non-option arguments. It then proceeds to cover how `gawk` searches for source files, reading standard input along with other files, `gawk`'s environment variables, `gawk`'s exit status, using include files, and obsolete and undocumented options and/or features.

Many of the options and features described here are discussed in more detail later in the book; feel free to skip over things in this chapter that don't interest you right now.

### 2.1 Invoking awk

There are two ways to run `awk`—with an explicit program or with one or more program files. Here are templates for both of them; items enclosed in [...] in these templates are optional:

```
awk [options] -f progfile [--] file ...
awk [options] [--] 'program' file ...
```

Besides traditional one-letter POSIX-style options, `gawk` also supports GNU long options.

It is possible to invoke `awk` with an empty program:

```
awk '' datafile1 datafile2
```

Doing so makes little sense, though; `awk` exits silently when given an empty program. If `--lint` has been specified on the command line, `gawk` issues a warning that the program is empty.



### 2.2 Command-Line Options

Options begin with a dash and consist of a single character. GNU-style long options consist of two dashes and a keyword. The keyword can be abbreviated, as long as the abbreviation allows the option to be uniquely identified. If the option takes an argument, then the keyword is either immediately followed by an equals sign ('=') and the argument's value, or the keyword and the argument's value are separated by whitespace. If a particular option with a value is given more than once, it is the last value that counts.

Each long option for `gawk` has a corresponding POSIX-style short option. The long and short options are interchangeable in all contexts. The following list describes options mandated by the POSIX standard:

`-F fs`

`--field-separator fs`

Set the FS variable to *fs* (see [Section 4.5 \[Specifying How Fields Are Separated\]](#), page 56).

`-f source-file`

`--file source-file`

Read `awk` program source from *source-file* instead of in the first non-option argument. This option may be given multiple times; the `awk` program consists of the concatenation the contents of each specified *source-file*.

`-v var=val`

`--assign var=val`

Set the variable *var* to the value *val* *before* execution of the program begins. Such variable values are available inside the `BEGIN` rule (see [Section 2.3 \[Other Command-Line Arguments\]](#), page 30).

The ‘-v’ option can only set one variable, but it can be used more than once, setting another variable each time, like this: ‘`awk -v foo=1 -v bar=2 ...`’.

**CAUTION:** Using ‘-v’ to set the values of the built-in variables may lead to surprising results. `awk` will reset the values of those variables as it needs to, possibly ignoring any predefined value you may have given.

`-W gawk-opt`

Provide an implementation-specific option. This is the POSIX convention for providing implementation-specific options. These options also have corresponding GNU-style long options. Note that the long options may be abbreviated, as long as the abbreviations remain unique. The full list of `gawk`-specific options is provided next.

`--`

Signal the end of the command-line options. The following arguments are not treated as options even if they begin with ‘-’. This interpretation of ‘--’ follows the POSIX argument parsing conventions.

This is useful if you have file names that start with ‘-’, or in shell scripts, if you have file names that will be specified by the user that could start with ‘-’. It is also useful for passing options on to the `awk` program; see [Section 12.4 \[Processing Command-Line Options\]](#), page 225.

The following list describes `gawk`-specific options:

`-b`

`--characters-as-bytes`

Cause `gawk` to treat all input data as single-byte characters. Normally, `gawk` follows the POSIX standard and attempts to process its input data according to the current locale. This can often involve converting multibyte characters into wide characters (internally), and can lead to problems or confusion if the input data does not contain valid multibyte characters. This option is an easy way to tell `gawk`: “hands off my data!”.

`-c`

`--traditional`

Specify *compatibility mode*, in which the GNU extensions to the `awk` language are disabled, so that `gawk` behaves just like Brian Kernighan’s version `awk`. See [Section A.5 \[Extensions in `gawk` Not in POSIX `awk`\]](#), page 303, which summarizes the extensions. Also see [Section C.1 \[Downward Compatibility and Debugging\]](#), page 325.

`-C`

`--copyright`

Print the short version of the General Public License and then exit.

`-d[file]`

`--dump-variables[=file]`

Print a sorted list of global variables, their types, and final values to *file*. If no *file* is provided, print this list to the file named ‘awkvars.out’ in the current directory. No space is allowed between the ‘-d’ and *file*, if *file* is supplied.

Having a list of all global variables is a good way to look for typographical errors in your programs. You would also use this option if you have a large program with a lot of functions, and you want to be sure that your functions don’t inadvertently use global variables that you meant to be local. (This is a particularly easy mistake to make with simple variable names like *i*, *j*, etc.)

`-e program-text`

`--source program-text`

Provide program source code in the *program-text*. This option allows you to mix source code in files with source code that you enter on the command line. This is particularly useful when you have library functions that you want to use from your command-line programs (see [Section 2.5.1 \[The AWKPATH Environment Variable\]](#), page 32).

`-E file`

`--exec file`

Similar to ‘-f’, read awk program text from *file*. There are two differences from ‘-f’:

- This option terminates option processing; anything else on the command line is passed on directly to the awk program.
- Command-line variable assignments of the form ‘var=value’ are disallowed.

This option is particularly necessary for World Wide Web CGI applications that pass arguments through the URL; using this option prevents a malicious (or other) user from passing in options, assignments, or awk source code (via ‘--source’) to the CGI application. This option should be used with ‘#!’ scripts (see [Section 1.1.4 \[Executable awk Programs\]](#), page 13), like so:

```
#!/usr/local/bin/gawk -E
```

```
awk program here ...
```

`-g`

`--gen-pot`

Analyze the source program and generate a GNU `gettext` Portable Object Template file on standard output for all string constants that have been marked for translation. See [Chapter 10 \[Internationalization with gawk\]](#), page 185, for information about this option.

`-h`

`--help`

Print a “usage” message summarizing the short and long style options that gawk accepts and then exit.

-L [value]

--lint[=value]

Warn about constructs that are dubious or nonportable to other `awk` implementations. Some warnings are issued when `gawk` first reads your program. Others are issued at runtime, as your program executes. With an optional argument of `'fatal'`, lint warnings become fatal errors. This may be drastic, but its use will certainly encourage the development of cleaner `awk` programs. With an optional argument of `'invalid'`, only warnings about things that are actually invalid are issued. (This is not fully implemented yet.)

Some warnings are only printed once, even if the dubious constructs they warn about occur multiple times in your `awk` program. Thus, when eliminating problems pointed out by `'--lint'`, you should take care to search for all occurrences of each inappropriate construct. As `awk` programs are usually short, doing so is not burdensome.

-n

--non-decimal-data

Enable automatic interpretation of octal and hexadecimal values in input data (see [Section 11.1 \[Allowing Nondecimal Input Data\]](#), page 195).

**CAUTION:** This option can severely break old programs. Use with care.

-N

--use-lc-numeric

Force the use of the locale's decimal point character when parsing numeric input data (see [Section 6.6 \[Where You Are Makes A Difference\]](#), page 110).

-O

--optimize

Enable some optimizations on the internal representation of the program. At the moment this includes just simple constant folding. The `gawk` maintainer hopes to add more optimizations over time.

-p[*file*]

--profile[=*file*]

Enable profiling of `awk` programs (see [Section 11.5 \[Profiling Your `awk` Programs\]](#), page 206). By default, profiles are created in a file named `'awkprof.out'`. The optional *file* argument allows you to specify a different file name for the profile file. No space is allowed between the `'-p'` and *file*, if *file* is supplied.

When run with `gawk`, the profile is just a “pretty printed” version of the program. When run with `pgawk`, the profile contains execution counts for each statement in the program in the left margin, and function call counts for each function.

-P

--posix

Operate in strict POSIX mode. This disables all `gawk` extensions (just like `'--traditional'`) and disables all extensions not allowed by POSIX. See [Section A.6 \[Common Extensions Summary\]](#), page 305, for a summary of

the extensions in `gawk` that are disabled by this option. Also, the following additional restrictions apply:

- Newlines do not act as whitespace to separate fields when `FS` is equal to a single space (see [Section 4.2 \[Examining Fields\]](#), page 52).
- Newlines are not allowed after ‘?’ or ‘.’ (see [Section 6.3.4 \[Conditional Expressions\]](#), page 107).
- Specifying ‘-Ft’ on the command-line does not set the value of `FS` to be a single TAB character (see [Section 4.5 \[Specifying How Fields Are Separated\]](#), page 56).
- The locale’s decimal point character is used for parsing input data (see [Section 6.6 \[Where You Are Makes A Difference\]](#), page 110).

If you supply both ‘--traditional’ and ‘--posix’ on the command line, ‘--posix’ takes precedence. `gawk` also issues a warning if both options are supplied.

-r

--re-interval

Allow interval expressions (see [Section 3.3 \[Regular Expression Operators\]](#), page 40) in regexps. This is now `gawk`’s default behavior. Nevertheless, this option remains both for backward compatibility, and for use in combination with the ‘--traditional’ option.

-R *file*

--command=*file*

`dgawk` only. Read `dgawk` debugger options and commands from *file*. See [Section 14.3.5 \[Obtaining Information About The Program and The Debugger State\]](#), page 295, for more information.

-S

--sandbox

Disable the `system()` function, input redirections with `getline`, output redirections with `print` and `printf`, and dynamic extensions. This is particularly useful when you want to run `awk` scripts from questionable sources and need to make sure the scripts can’t access your system (other than the specified input data file).

-t

--lint-old

Warn about constructs that are not available in the original version of `awk` from Version 7 Unix (see [Section A.1 \[Major Changes Between V7 and SVR3.1\]](#), page 301).

-V

--version

Print version information for this particular copy of `gawk`. This allows you to determine if your copy of `gawk` is up to date with respect to whatever the Free Software Foundation is currently distributing. It is also useful for bug reports (see [Section B.4 \[Reporting Problems and Bugs\]](#), page 320).

As long as program text has been supplied, any other options are flagged as invalid with a warning message but are otherwise ignored.

In compatibility mode, as a special case, if the value of *fs* supplied to the ‘-F’ option is ‘t’, then FS is set to the TAB character (“\t”). This is true only for ‘--traditional’ and not for ‘--posix’ (see [Section 4.5 \[Specifying How Fields Are Separated\]](#), page 56).

The ‘-f’ option may be used more than once on the command line. If it is, `awk` reads its program source from all of the named files, as if they had been concatenated together into one big file. This is useful for creating libraries of `awk` functions. These functions can be written once and then retrieved from a standard place, instead of having to be included into each individual program. (As mentioned in [Section 9.2.1 \[Function Definition Syntax\]](#), page 170, function names must be unique.)

With standard `awk`, library functions can still be used, even if the program is entered at the terminal, by specifying ‘-f /dev/tty’. After typing your program, type `Ctrl-d` (the end-of-file character) to terminate it. (You may also use ‘-f -’ to read program source from the standard input but then you will not be able to also use the standard input as a source of data.)

Because it is clumsy using the standard `awk` mechanisms to mix source file and command-line `awk` programs, `gawk` provides the ‘--source’ option. This does not require you to preempt the standard input for your source code; it allows you to easily mix command-line and library source code (see [Section 2.5.1 \[The AWKPATH Environment Variable\]](#), page 32). The ‘--source’ option may also be used multiple times on the command line.

If no ‘-f’ or ‘--source’ option is specified, then `gawk` uses the first non-option command-line argument as the text of the program source code.

If the environment variable `POSIXLY_CORRECT` exists, then `gawk` behaves in strict POSIX mode, exactly as if you had supplied the ‘--posix’ command-line option. Many GNU programs look for this environment variable to turn on strict POSIX mode. If ‘--lint’ is supplied on the command line and `gawk` turns on POSIX mode because of `POSIXLY_CORRECT`, then it issues a warning message indicating that POSIX mode is in effect. You would typically set this variable in your shell’s startup file. For a Bourne-compatible shell (such as Bash), you would add these lines to the ‘.profile’ file in your home directory:

```
POSIXLY_CORRECT=true
export POSIXLY_CORRECT
```

For a C shell-compatible shell,<sup>1</sup> you would add this line to the ‘.login’ file in your home directory:

```
setenv POSIXLY_CORRECT true
```

Having `POSIXLY_CORRECT` set is not recommended for daily use, but it is good for testing the portability of your programs to other environments.

## 2.3 Other Command-Line Arguments

Any additional arguments on the command line are normally treated as input files to be processed in the order specified. However, an argument that has the form `var=value`, assigns the value *value* to the variable *var*—it does not specify a file at all. (See [Section 6.1.3.2 \[Assigning Variables on the Command Line\]](#), page 92.)

---

<sup>1</sup> Not recommended.

All these arguments are made available to your `awk` program in the `ARGV` array (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126). Command-line options and the program text (if present) are omitted from `ARGV`. All other arguments, including variable assignments, are included. As each element of `ARGV` is processed, `gawk` sets the variable `ARGIND` to the index in `ARGV` of the current element.

The distinction between file name arguments and variable-assignment arguments is made when `awk` is about to open the next input file. At that point in execution, it checks the file name to see whether it is really a variable assignment; if so, `awk` sets the variable instead of reading a file.

Therefore, the variables actually receive the given values after all previously specified files have been read. In particular, the values of variables assigned in this fashion are *not* available inside a `BEGIN` rule (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114), because such rules are run before `awk` begins scanning the argument list.

The variable values given on the command line are processed for escape sequences (see [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), page 38).



In some earlier implementations of `awk`, when a variable assignment occurred before any file names, the assignment would happen *before* the `BEGIN` rule was executed. `awk`'s behavior was thus inconsistent; some command-line assignments were available inside the `BEGIN` rule, while others were not. Unfortunately, some applications came to depend upon this “feature.” When `awk` was changed to be more consistent, the ‘-v’ option was added to accommodate applications that depended upon the old behavior.

The variable assignment feature is most useful for assigning to variables such as `RS`, `OFS`, and `ORS`, which control input and output formats before scanning the data files. It is also useful for controlling state if multiple passes are needed over a data file. For example:

```
awk 'pass == 1 { pass 1 stuff }
     pass == 2 { pass 2 stuff }' pass=1 mydata pass=2 mydata
```

Given the variable assignment feature, the ‘-F’ option for setting the value of `FS` is not strictly necessary. It remains for historical compatibility.

## 2.4 Naming Standard Input

Often, you may wish to read standard input together with other files. For example, you may wish to read one file, read standard input coming from a pipe, and then read another file.

The way to name the standard input, with all versions of `awk`, is to use a single, stand-alone minus sign or dash, ‘-’. For example:

```
some_command | awk -f myprog.awk file1 - file2
```

Here, `awk` first reads ‘file1’, then it reads the output of `some_command`, and finally it reads ‘file2’.

You may also use “-” to name standard input when reading files with `getline` (see [Section 4.9.3 \[Using getline from a File\]](#), page 69).

In addition, `gawk` allows you to specify the special file name ‘/dev/stdin’, both on the command line and with `getline`. Some other versions of `awk` also support this, but it is not standard. (Some operating systems provide a ‘/dev/stdin’ file in the file system, however, `gawk` always processes this file name itself.)

## 2.5 The Environment Variables gawk Uses

A number of environment variables influence how `gawk` behaves.

### 2.5.1 The AWKPATH Environment Variable

In most `awk` implementations, you must supply a precise path name for each program file, unless the file is in the current directory. But in `gawk`, if the file name supplied to the `-f` option does not contain a `/`, then `gawk` searches a list of directories (called the *search path*), one by one, looking for a file with the specified name.

The search path is a string consisting of directory names separated by colons. `gawk` gets its search path from the `AWKPATH` environment variable. If that variable does not exist, `gawk` uses a default path, `./usr/local/share/awk`.<sup>2</sup>

The search path feature is particularly useful for building libraries of useful `awk` functions. The library files can be placed in a standard directory in the default path and then specified on the command line with a short file name. Otherwise, the full file name would have to be typed for each file.

By using both the `--source` and `-f` options, your command-line `awk` programs can use facilities in `awk` library files (see [Chapter 12 \[A Library of awk Functions\]](#), page 211). Path searching is not done if `gawk` is in compatibility mode. This is true for both `--traditional` and `--posix`. See [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25.

**NOTE:** To include the current directory in the path, either place `.` explicitly in the path or write a null entry in the path. (A null entry is indicated by starting or ending the path with a colon or by placing two colons next to each other (`::`).) This path search mechanism is similar to the shell's.

However, `gawk` always looks in the current directory *before* searching `AWKPATH`, so there is no real reason to include the current directory in the search path.

If `AWKPATH` is not defined in the environment, `gawk` places its default search path into `ENVIRON["AWKPATH"]`. This makes it easy to determine the actual search path that `gawk` will use from within an `awk` program.

While you can change `ENVIRON["AWKPATH"]` within your `awk` program, this has no effect on the running program's behavior. This makes sense: the `AWKPATH` environment variable is used to find the program source files. Once your program is running, all the files have been found, and `gawk` no longer needs to use `AWKPATH`.

### 2.5.2 Other Environment Variables

A number of other environment variables affect `gawk`'s behavior, but they are more specialized. Those in the following list are meant to be used by regular users.

#### POSIXLY\_CORRECT

Causes `gawk` to switch POSIX compatibility mode, disabling all traditional and GNU extensions. See [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25.

---

<sup>2</sup> Your version of `gawk` may use a different directory; it will depend upon how `gawk` was built and installed. The actual directory is the value of `$(datadir)` generated when `gawk` was configured. You probably don't need to worry about this, though.

**GAWK SOCK\_RETRIES**

Controls the number of time `gawk` will attempt to retry a two-way TCP/IP (socket) connection before giving up. See [Section 11.4 \[Using `gawk` for Network Programming\]](#), page 205.

**GAWK\_MSEC\_SLEEP**

Specifies the interval between connection retries, in milliseconds. On systems that do not support the `usleep()` system call, the value is rounded up to an integral number of seconds.

The environment variables in the following list are meant for use by the `gawk` developers for testing and tuning. They are subject to change. The variables are:

**AVG\_CHAIN\_MAX**

The average number of items `gawk` will maintain on a hash chain for managing arrays.

**AWK\_HASH** If this variable exists with a value of `'gst'`, `gawk` will switch to using the hash function from GNU Smalltalk for managing arrays. This function may be marginally faster than the standard function.

**AWKREADFUNC**

If this variable exists, `gawk` switches to reading source files one line at a time, instead of reading in blocks. This exists for debugging problems on filesystems on non-POSIX operating systems where I/O is performed in records, not in blocks.

**GAWK\_NO\_DFA**

If this variable exists, `gawk` does not use the DFA regexp matcher for “does it match” kinds of tests. This can cause `gawk` to be slower. Its purpose is to help isolate differences between the two regexp matchers that `gawk` uses internally. (There aren’t supposed to be differences, but occasionally theory and practice don’t coordinate with each other.)

**GAWK\_STACKSIZE**

This specifies the amount by which `gawk` should grow its internal evaluation stack, when needed.

**TIDYMEM** If this variable exists, `gawk` uses the `mtrace()` library calls from GNU LIBC to help track down possible memory leaks.

## 2.6 `gawk`’s Exit Status

If the `exit` statement is used with a value (see [Section 7.4.10 \[The `exit` Statement\]](#), page 125), then `gawk` exits with the numeric value given to it.

Otherwise, if there were no problems during execution, `gawk` exits with the value of the C constant `EXIT_SUCCESS`. This is usually zero.

If an error occurs, `gawk` exits with the value of the C constant `EXIT_FAILURE`. This is usually one.

If `gawk` exits because of a fatal error, the exit status is 2. On non-POSIX systems, this value may be mapped to `EXIT_FAILURE`.

## 2.7 Including Other Files Into Your Program

This section describes a feature that is specific to `gawk`.

The `@include` keyword can be used to read external `awk` source files. This gives you the ability to split large `awk` source files into smaller, more manageable pieces, and also lets you reuse common `awk` code from various `awk` scripts. In other words, you can group together `awk` functions, used to carry out specific tasks, into external files. These files can be used just like function libraries, using the `@include` keyword in conjunction with the `AWKPATH` environment variable.

Let's see an example. We'll start with two (trivial) `awk` scripts, namely `'test1'` and `'test2'`. Here is the `'test1'` script:

```
BEGIN {
    print "This is script test1."
}
```

and here is `'test2'`:

```
@include "test1"
BEGIN {
    print "This is script test2."
}
```

Running `gawk` with `'test2'` produces the following result:

```
$ gawk -f test2
+ This is file test1.
+ This is file test2.
```

`gawk` runs the `'test2'` script which includes `'test1'` using the `@include` keyword. So, to include external `awk` source files you just use `@include` followed by the name of the file to be included, enclosed in double quotes.

**NOTE:** Keep in mind that this is a language construct and the file name cannot be a string variable, but rather just a literal string in double quotes.

The files to be included may be nested; e.g., given a third script, namely `'test3'`:

```
@include "test2"
BEGIN {
    print "This is script test3."
}
```

Running `gawk` with the `'test3'` script produces the following results:

```
$ gawk -f test3
+ This is file test1.
+ This is file test2.
+ This is file test3.
```

The file name can, of course, be a pathname. For example:

```
@include "../io_funcs"
```

or:

```
@include "/usr/awklib/network"
```

are valid. The `AWKPATH` environment variable can be of great value when using `@include`. The same rules for the use of the `AWKPATH` variable in command-line file searches (see [Section 2.5.1 \[The AWKPATH Environment Variable\], page 32](#)) apply to `@include` also.

This is very helpful in constructing `gawk` function libraries. If you have a large script with useful, general purpose `awk` functions, you can break it down into library files and put those files in a special directory. You can then include those “libraries,” using either the full pathnames of the files, or by setting the `AWKPATH` environment variable accordingly and then using `@include` with just the file part of the full pathname. Of course you can have more than one directory to keep library files; the more complex the working environment is, the more directories you may need to organize the files to be included.

Given the ability to specify multiple `-f` options, the `@include` mechanism is not strictly necessary. However, the `@include` keyword can help you in constructing self-contained `gawk` programs, thus reducing the need for writing complex and tedious command lines. In particular, `@include` is very useful for writing CGI scripts to be run from web pages.

As mentioned in [Section 2.5.1 \[The AWKPATH Environment Variable\], page 32](#), the current directory is always searched first for source files, before searching in `AWKPATH`, and this also applies to files named with `@include`.

## 2.8 Obsolete Options and/or Features

This section describes features and/or command-line options from previous releases of `gawk` that are either not available in the current version or that are still supported but deprecated (meaning that they will *not* be in the next release).

The process-related special files `/dev/pid`, `/dev/ppid`, `/dev/pgrp`, and `/dev/user` were deprecated in `gawk` 3.1, but still worked. As of version 4.0, they are no longer interpreted specially by `gawk`. (Use `PROCINFO` instead; see [Section 7.5.2 \[Built-in Variables That Convey Information\], page 129](#).)

## 2.9 Undocumented Options and Features

*Use the Source, Luke!*

Obi-Wan

This section intentionally left blank.



## 3 Regular Expressions

A *regular expression*, or *regexp*, is a way of describing a set of strings. Because regular expressions are such a fundamental part of `awk` programming, their format and use deserve a separate chapter.

A regular expression enclosed in slashes (`/`) is an `awk` pattern that matches every input record whose text belongs to that set. The simplest regular expression is a sequence of letters, numbers, or both. Such a regexp matches any string that contains that sequence. Thus, the regexp `'foo'` matches any string containing `'foo'`. Therefore, the pattern `/foo/` matches any input record containing the three characters `'foo'` *anywhere* in the record. Other kinds of regexps let you specify more complicated classes of strings.

Initially, the examples in this chapter are simple. As we explain more about how regular expressions work, we present more complicated instances.

### 3.1 How to Use Regular Expressions

A regular expression can be used as a pattern by enclosing it in slashes. Then the regular expression is tested against the entire text of each record. (Normally, it only needs to match some part of the text in order to succeed.) For example, the following prints the second field of each record that contains the string `'foo'` anywhere in it:

```
$ awk '/foo/ { print $2 }' BBS-list
+ 555-1234
+ 555-6699
+ 555-6480
+ 555-2127
```

Regular expressions can also be used in matching expressions. These expressions allow you to specify the string to match against; it need not be the entire current input record. The two operators `'~'` and `'!~'` perform regular expression comparisons. Expressions using these operators can be used as patterns, or in `if`, `while`, `for`, and `do` statements. (See [Section 7.4 \[Control Statements in Actions\]](#), page 118.) For example:

```
exp ~ /regexp/
```

is true if the expression `exp` (taken as a string) matches `regexp`. The following example matches, or selects, all input records with the uppercase letter `'J'` somewhere in the first field:

```
$ awk '$1 ~ /J/' inventory-shipped
+ Jan 13 25 15 115
+ Jun 31 42 75 492
+ Jul 24 34 67 436
+ Jan 21 36 64 620
```

So does this:

```
awk '{ if ($1 ~ /J/) print }' inventory-shipped
```

This next example is true if the expression `exp` (taken as a character string) does *not* match `regexp`:

```
exp !~ /regexp/
```

The following example matches, or selects, all input records whose first field *does not* contain the uppercase letter ‘J’:

```
$ awk '$1 !~ /J/' inventory-shipped
- Feb 15 32 24 226
- Mar 15 24 34 228
- Apr 31 52 63 420
- May 16 34 29 208
...
```

When a regexp is enclosed in slashes, such as `/foo/`, we call it a *regexp constant*, much like 5.27 is a numeric constant and `"foo"` is a string constant.

## 3.2 Escape Sequences

Some characters cannot be included literally in string constants (`"foo"`) or regexp constants (`/foo/`). Instead, they should be represented with *escape sequences*, which are character sequences beginning with a backslash (`\`). One use of an escape sequence is to include a double-quote character in a string constant. Because a plain double quote ends the string, you must use `\"` to represent an actual double-quote character as a part of the string. For example:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { print "He said \"hi!\" to her." }'
- He said "hi!" to her.
```

The backslash character itself is another character that cannot be included normally; you must write `\\` to put one backslash in the string or regexp. Thus, the string whose contents are the two characters `"` and `\` must be written `"\\"`.

Other escape sequences represent unprintable characters such as TAB or newline. While there is nothing to stop you from entering most unprintable characters directly in a string constant or regexp constant, they may look ugly.

The following table lists all the escape sequences used in `awk` and what they represent. Unless noted otherwise, all these escape sequences apply to both string constants and regexp constants:

<code>\\</code>	A literal backslash, <code>\</code> .
<code>\a</code>	The “alert” character, <i>Ctrl-g</i> , ASCII code 7 (BEL). (This usually makes some sort of audible noise.)
<code>\b</code>	Backspace, <i>Ctrl-h</i> , ASCII code 8 (BS).
<code>\f</code>	Formfeed, <i>Ctrl-l</i> , ASCII code 12 (FF).
<code>\n</code>	Newline, <i>Ctrl-j</i> , ASCII code 10 (LF).
<code>\r</code>	Carriage return, <i>Ctrl-m</i> , ASCII code 13 (CR).
<code>\t</code>	Horizontal TAB, <i>Ctrl-i</i> , ASCII code 9 (HT).
<code>\v</code>	Vertical tab, <i>Ctrl-k</i> , ASCII code 11 (VT).
<code>\nnn</code>	The octal value <i>nnn</i> , where <i>nnn</i> stands for 1 to 3 digits between ‘0’ and ‘7’. For example, the code for the ASCII ESC (escape) character is <code>\033</code> .

- `\xhh...` The hexadecimal value *hh*, where *hh* stands for a sequence of hexadecimal digits ('0'–'9', and either 'A'–'F' or 'a'–'f'). Like the same construct in ISO C, the escape sequence continues until the first nonhexadecimal digit is seen. (c.e.) However, using more than two hexadecimal digits produces undefined results. (The '`\x`' escape sequence is not allowed in POSIX `awk`.)
- `\/` A literal slash (necessary for regexp constants only). This sequence is used when you want to write a regexp constant that contains a slash. Because the regexp is delimited by slashes, you need to escape the slash that is part of the pattern, in order to tell `awk` to keep processing the rest of the regexp.
- `\"` A literal double quote (necessary for string constants only). This sequence is used when you want to write a string constant that contains a double quote. Because the string is delimited by double quotes, you need to escape the quote that is part of the string, in order to tell `awk` to keep processing the rest of the string.

In `gawk`, a number of additional two-character sequences that begin with a backslash have special meaning in regexps. See [Section 3.5 \[gawk-Specific Regexp Operators\], page 44](#).

In a regexp, a backslash before any character that is not in the previous list and not listed in [Section 3.5 \[gawk-Specific Regexp Operators\], page 44](#), means that the next character should be taken literally, even if it would normally be a regexp operator. For example, `/a\b/` matches the three characters 'a+b'.

For complete portability, do not use a backslash before any character not shown in the previous list.

To summarize:

- The escape sequences in the table above are always processed first, for both string constants and regexp constants. This happens very early, as soon as `awk` reads your program.
- `gawk` processes both regexp constants and dynamic regexps (see [Section 3.8 \[Using Dynamic Regexps\], page 47](#)), for the special operators listed in [Section 3.5 \[gawk-Specific Regexp Operators\], page 44](#).
- A backslash before any other character means to treat that character literally.

### Advanced Notes: Backslash Before Regular Characters

If you place a backslash in a string constant before something that is not one of the characters previously listed, POSIX `awk` purposely leaves what happens as undefined. There are two choices:

Strip the backslash out

This is what Brian Kernighan's `awk` and `gawk` both do. For example, `"a\qc"` is the same as `"aqc"`. (Because this is such an easy bug both to introduce and to miss, `gawk` warns you about it.) Consider `'FS = "[ \t]+\| [ \t]+'"'` to use vertical bars surrounded by whitespace as the field separator. There should be two backslashes in the string: `'FS = "[ \t]+\|[ \t]+'"'`.

Leave the backslash alone

Some other `awk` implementations do this. In such implementations, typing `"a\qc"` is the same as typing `"a\\qc"`.

## Advanced Notes: Escape Sequences for Metacharacters

Suppose you use an octal or hexadecimal escape to represent a regexp metacharacter. (See [Section 3.3 \[Regular Expression Operators\]](#), page 40.) Does `awk` treat the character as a literal character or as a regexp operator?



Historically, such characters were taken literally. However, the POSIX standard indicates that they should be treated as real metacharacters, which is what `gawk` does. In compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), `gawk` treats the characters represented by octal and hexadecimal escape sequences literally when used in regexp constants. Thus, `/a\52b/` is equivalent to `/a*b/`.

## 3.3 Regular Expression Operators

You can combine regular expressions with special characters, called *regular expression operators* or *metacharacters*, to increase the power and versatility of regular expressions.

The escape sequences described earlier in [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), page 38, are valid inside a regexp. They are introduced by a ‘\’ and are recognized and converted into corresponding real characters as the very first step in processing regexps.

Here is a list of metacharacters. All characters that are not escape sequences and that are not listed in the table stand for themselves:

\ This is used to suppress the special meaning of a character when matching. For example, ‘\\$’ matches the character ‘\$’.

^ This matches the beginning of a string. For example, ‘^@chapter’ matches ‘@chapter’ at the beginning of a string and can be used to identify chapter beginnings in Texinfo source files. The ‘^’ is known as an *anchor*, because it anchors the pattern to match only at the beginning of the string.

It is important to realize that ‘^’ does not match the beginning of a line embedded in a string. The condition is not true in the following example:

```
if ("line1\nLINE 2" ~ /^L/) ...
```

\$ This is similar to ‘^’, but it matches only at the end of a string. For example, ‘p\$’ matches a record that ends with a ‘p’. The ‘\$’ is an anchor and does not match the end of a line embedded in a string. The condition in the following example is not true:

```
if ("line1\nLINE 2" ~ /1$/) ...
```

. (period) This matches any single character, *including* the newline character. For example, ‘.P’ matches any single character followed by a ‘P’ in a string. Using concatenation, we can make a regular expression such as ‘U.A’, which matches any three-character sequence that begins with ‘U’ and ends with ‘A’.

In strict POSIX mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), ‘.’ does not match the NUL character, which is a character with all bits equal to zero. Otherwise, NUL is just another character. Other versions of `awk` may not be able to match the NUL character.

- [...] This is called a *bracket expression*.<sup>1</sup> It matches any *one* of the characters that are enclosed in the square brackets. For example, '[MVX]' matches any one of the characters 'M', 'V', or 'X' in a string. A full discussion of what can be inside the square brackets of a bracket expression is given in [Section 3.4 \[Using Bracket Expressions\]](#), page 42.
- [^ ...] This is a *complemented bracket expression*. The first character after the '[' *must* be a '^'. It matches any characters *except* those in the square brackets. For example, '[^awk]' matches any character that is not an 'a', 'w', or 'k'.
- | This is the *alternation operator* and it is used to specify alternatives. The '|' has the lowest precedence of all the regular expression operators. For example, '^P|[:digit:]' matches any string that matches either '^P' or '[:digit:]'. This means it matches any string that starts with 'P' or contains a digit.  
The alternation applies to the largest possible regexps on either side.
- (...) Parentheses are used for grouping in regular expressions, as in arithmetic. They can be used to concatenate regular expressions containing the alternation operator, '|'. For example, '@(samp|code)\{[^}]+\}' matches both '@code{foo}' and '@samp{bar}'. (These are Texinfo formatting control sequences. The '+' is explained further on in this list.)
- \*
- This symbol means that the preceding regular expression should be repeated as many times as necessary to find a match. For example, 'ph\*' applies the '\*' symbol to the preceding 'h' and looks for matches of one 'p' followed by any number of 'h's. This also matches just 'p' if no 'h's are present.  
The '\*' repeats the *smallest* possible preceding expression. (Use parentheses if you want to repeat a larger expression.) It finds as many repetitions as possible. For example, 'awk '/\ (c[ad][ad]\*r x\)/ { print }' sample' prints every record in 'sample' containing a string of the form '(car x)', '(cdr x)', '(cadr x)', and so on. Notice the escaping of the parentheses by preceding them with backslashes.
- +
- This symbol is similar to '\*', except that the preceding expression must be matched at least once. This means that 'wh+y' would match 'why' and 'why', but not 'wy', whereas 'wh\*y' would match all three of these strings. The following is a simpler way of writing the last '\*' example:  
awk '/\ (c[ad]+r x\)/ { print }' sample
- ?
- This symbol is similar to '\*', except that the preceding expression can be matched either once or not at all. For example, 'fe?d' matches 'fed' and 'fd', but nothing else.
- {n}
- {n,}
- {n,m}
- One or two numbers inside braces denote an *interval expression*. If there is one number in the braces, the preceding regexp is repeated *n* times. If there are

<sup>1</sup> In other literature, you may see a bracket expression referred to as either a *character set*, a *character class*, or a *character list*.

two numbers separated by a comma, the preceding regexp is repeated *n* to *m* times. If there is one number followed by a comma, then the preceding regexp is repeated at least *n* times:

`wh{3}y` Matches ‘whhhy’, but not ‘why’ or ‘whhhhy’.

`wh{3,5}y` Matches ‘whhhy’, ‘whhhhy’, or ‘whhhhhhy’, only.

`wh{2,}y` Matches ‘whhy’ or ‘whhhhy’, and so on.

Interval expressions were not traditionally available in `awk`. They were added as part of the POSIX standard to make `awk` and `egrep` consistent with each other.

Initially, because old programs may use ‘{’ and ‘}’ in regexp constants, `gawk` did *not* match interval expressions in regexps.

However, beginning with version 4.0, `gawk` does match interval expressions by default. This is because compatibility with POSIX has become more important to most `gawk` users than compatibility with old programs.

For programs that use ‘{’ and ‘}’ in regexp constants, it is good practice to always escape them with a backslash. Then the regexp constants are valid and work the way you want them to, using any version of `awk`.<sup>2</sup>

In regular expressions, the ‘\*’, ‘+’, and ‘?’ operators, as well as the braces ‘{’ and ‘}’, have the highest precedence, followed by concatenation, and finally by ‘|’. As in arithmetic, parentheses can change how operators are grouped.

In POSIX `awk` and `gawk`, the ‘\*’, ‘+’, and ‘?’ operators stand for themselves when there is nothing in the regexp that precedes them. For example, `/+ /` matches a literal plus sign. However, many other versions of `awk` treat such a usage as a syntax error.

If `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), interval expressions are not available in regular expressions.

### 3.4 Using Bracket Expressions

As mentioned earlier, a bracket expression matches any character amongst those listed between the opening and closing square brackets.

Within a bracket expression, a *range expression* consists of two characters separated by a hyphen. It matches any single character that sorts between the two characters, based upon the system’s native character set. For example, ‘[0-9]’ is equivalent to ‘[0123456789]’. (See [Section A.7 \[Regexp Ranges and Locales: A Long Sad Story\]](#), page 306, for an explanation of how the POSIX standard and `gawk` have changed over time. This is mainly of historical interest.)

To include one of the characters ‘\’, ‘]’, ‘-’, or ‘^’ in a bracket expression, put a ‘\’ in front of it. For example:

```
[d\]]
```

matches either ‘d’ or ‘]’.

This treatment of ‘\’ in bracket expressions is compatible with other `awk` implementations and is also mandated by POSIX. The regular expressions in `awk` are a superset of the POSIX

<sup>2</sup> Use two backslashes if you’re using a string constant with a regexp operator or function.

specification for Extended Regular Expressions (EREs). POSIX EREs are based on the regular expressions accepted by the traditional `egrep` utility.

*Character classes* are a feature introduced in the POSIX standard. A character class is a special notation for describing lists of characters that have a specific attribute, but the actual characters can vary from country to country and/or from character set to character set. For example, the notion of what is an alphabetic character differs between the United States and France.

A character class is only valid in a regexp *inside* the brackets of a bracket expression. Character classes consist of ‘[:’, a keyword denoting the class, and ‘:]’. [Table 3.1](#) lists the character classes defined by the POSIX standard.

Class	Meaning
[:alnum:]	Alphanumeric characters.
[:alpha:]	Alphabetic characters.
[:blank:]	Space and TAB characters.
[:cntrl:]	Control characters.
[:digit:]	Numeric characters.
[:graph:]	Characters that are both printable and visible. (A space is printable but not visible, whereas an ‘a’ is both.)
[:lower:]	Lowercase alphabetic characters.
[:print:]	Printable characters (characters that are not control characters).
[:punct:]	Punctuation characters (characters that are not letters, digits, control characters, or space characters).
[:space:]	Space characters (such as space, TAB, and formfeed, to name a few).
[:upper:]	Uppercase alphabetic characters.
[:xdigit:]	Characters that are hexadecimal digits.

Table 3.1: POSIX Character Classes

For example, before the POSIX standard, you had to write `/[A-Za-z0-9]/` to match alphanumeric characters. If your character set had other alphabetic characters in it, this would not match them. With the POSIX character classes, you can write `/[[:alnum:]]/` to match the alphabetic and numeric characters in your character set.

Two additional special sequences can appear in bracket expressions. These apply to non-ASCII character sets, which can have single symbols (called *collating elements*) that are represented with more than one character. They can also have several characters that are equivalent for *collating*, or sorting, purposes. (For example, in French, a plain “e” and a grave-accented “è” are equivalent.) These sequences are:

#### Collating symbols

Multicharacter collating elements enclosed between ‘[.’ and ‘.]’. For example, if ‘ch’ is a collating element, then `[[:ch.]]` is a regexp that matches this collating element, whereas `[ch]` is a regexp that matches either ‘c’ or ‘h’.

#### Equivalence classes

Locale-specific names for a list of characters that are equal. The name is enclosed between ‘[=’ and ‘=]’. For example, the name ‘e’ might be used to rep-

resent all of “e,” “è,” and “é.” In this case, `[[=e=]]` is a regexp that matches any of ‘e’, ‘é’, or ‘è’.

These features are very valuable in non-English-speaking locales.

**CAUTION:** The library functions that `gawk` uses for regular expression matching currently recognize only POSIX character classes; they do not recognize collating symbols or equivalence classes.

### 3.5 `gawk`-Specific Regexp Operators

GNU software that deals with regular expressions provides a number of additional regexp operators. These operators are described in this section and are specific to `gawk`; they are not available in other `awk` implementations. Most of the additional operators deal with word matching. For our purposes, a *word* is a sequence of one or more letters, digits, or underscores (‘\_’):

<code>\s</code>	Matches any whitespace character. Think of it as shorthand for <code>[[ :space: ]]</code> .
<code>\S</code>	Matches any character that is not whitespace. Think of it as shorthand for <code>[^ :space: ]]</code> .
<code>\w</code>	Matches any word-constituent character—that is, it matches any letter, digit, or underscore. Think of it as shorthand for <code>[[ :alnum: ]_]</code> .
<code>\W</code>	Matches any character that is not word-constituent. Think of it as shorthand for <code>[^ :alnum: ]_]</code> .
<code>\&lt;</code>	Matches the empty string at the beginning of a word. For example, <code>/\&lt;away/</code> matches ‘away’ but not ‘stowaway’.
<code>\&gt;</code>	Matches the empty string at the end of a word. For example, <code>/stow\&gt;/</code> matches ‘stow’ but not ‘stowaway’.
<code>\y</code>	Matches the empty string at either the beginning or the end of a word (i.e., the word boundary). For example, <code>\yballs?\y</code> matches either ‘ball’ or ‘balls’, as a separate word.
<code>\B</code>	Matches the empty string that occurs between two word-constituent characters. For example, <code>/\Brat\B/</code> matches ‘crate’ but it does not match ‘dirty rat’. ‘\B’ is essentially the opposite of ‘\y’.

There are two other operators that work on buffers. In Emacs, a *buffer* is, naturally, an Emacs buffer. For other programs, `gawk`’s regexp library routines consider the entire string to match as the buffer. The operators are:

<code>\‘</code>	Matches the empty string at the beginning of a buffer (string).
<code>\’</code>	Matches the empty string at the end of a buffer (string).

Because ‘^’ and ‘\$’ always work in terms of the beginning and end of strings, these operators don’t add any new capabilities for `awk`. They are provided for compatibility with other GNU software.

In other GNU software, the word-boundary operator is ‘\b’. However, that conflicts with the `awk` language’s definition of ‘\b’ as backspace, so `gawk` uses a different letter. An

alternative method would have been to require two backslashes in the GNU operators, but this was deemed too confusing. The current method of using ‘\y’ for the GNU ‘\b’ appears to be the lesser of two evils.

The various command-line options (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25) control how `gawk` interprets characters in regexps:

No options

In the default case, `gawk` provides all the facilities of POSIX regexps and the previously described GNU regexp operators.

`--posix` Only POSIX regexps are supported; the GNU operators are not special (e.g., ‘\w’ matches a literal ‘w’). Interval expressions are allowed.

`--traditional`

Traditional Unix `awk` regexps are matched. The GNU operators are not special, and interval expressions are not available. The POSIX character classes ([[:alnum:]], etc.) are supported, as Brian Kernighan’s `awk` does support them. Characters described by octal and hexadecimal escape sequences are treated literally, even if they represent regexp metacharacters.

`--re-interval`

Allow interval expressions in regexps, if ‘`--traditional`’ has been provided. Otherwise, interval expressions are available by default.

### 3.6 Case Sensitivity in Matching

Case is normally significant in regular expressions, both when matching ordinary characters (i.e., not metacharacters) and inside bracket expressions. Thus, a ‘w’ in a regular expression matches only a lowercase ‘w’ and not an uppercase ‘W’.

The simplest way to do a case-independent match is to use a bracket expression—for example, ‘[Ww]’. However, this can be cumbersome if you need to use it often, and it can make the regular expressions harder to read. There are two alternatives that you might prefer.

One way to perform a case-insensitive match at a particular point in the program is to convert the data to a single case, using the `tolower()` or `toupper()` built-in string functions (which we haven’t discussed yet; see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). For example:

```
tolower($1) ~ /foo/ { ... }
```

converts the first field to lowercase before matching against it. This works in any POSIX-compliant `awk`.

Another method, specific to `gawk`, is to set the variable `IGNORECASE` to a nonzero value (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126). When `IGNORECASE` is not zero, *all* regexp and string operations ignore case. Changing the value of `IGNORECASE` dynamically controls the case-sensitivity of the program as it runs. Case is significant by default because `IGNORECASE` (like most variables) is initialized to zero:

```
x = "aB"
if (x ~ /ab/) ... # this test will fail
```

```
IGNORECASE = 1
if (x ~ /ab/) ... # now it will succeed
```

In general, you cannot use `IGNORECASE` to make certain rules case-insensitive and other rules case-sensitive, because there is no straightforward way to set `IGNORECASE` just for the pattern of a particular rule.<sup>3</sup> To do this, use either bracket expressions or `tolower()`. However, one thing you can do with `IGNORECASE` only is dynamically turn case-sensitivity on or off for all the rules at once.

`IGNORECASE` can be set on the command line or in a `BEGIN` rule (see [Section 2.3 \[Other Command-Line Arguments\]](#), page 30; also see [Section 7.1.4.1 \[Startup and Cleanup Actions\]](#), page 114). Setting `IGNORECASE` from the command line is a way to make a program case-insensitive without having to edit it.

Both `regexp` and string comparison operations are affected by `IGNORECASE`.

In multibyte locales, the equivalences between upper- and lowercase characters are tested based on the wide-character values of the locale’s character set. Otherwise, the characters are tested based on the ISO-8859-1 (ISO Latin-1) character set. This character set is a superset of the traditional 128 ASCII characters, which also provides a number of characters suitable for use with European languages.<sup>4</sup>

The value of `IGNORECASE` has no effect if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25). Case is always significant in compatibility mode.

### 3.7 How Much Text Matches?

Consider the following:

```
echo aaaabcd | awk '{ sub(/a+/, "<A>"); print }'
```

This example uses the `sub()` function (which we haven’t discussed yet; see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149) to make a change to the input record. Here, the `regexp /a+/` indicates “one or more ‘a’ characters,” and the replacement text is ‘<A>’.

The input contains four ‘a’ characters. `awk` (and POSIX) regular expressions always match the leftmost, *longest* sequence of input characters that can match. Thus, all four ‘a’ characters are replaced with ‘<A>’ in this example:

```
$ echo aaaabcd | awk '{ sub(/a+/, "<A>"); print }'
+ <A>bcd
```

For simple match/no-match tests, this is not so important. But when doing text matching and substitutions with the `match()`, `sub()`, `gsub()`, and `gensub()` functions, it is very important. Understanding this principle is also important for `regexp`-based record and field splitting (see [Section 4.1 \[How Input Is Split into Records\]](#), page 49, and also see [Section 4.5 \[Specifying How Fields Are Separated\]](#), page 56).

<sup>3</sup> Experienced C and C++ programmers will note that it is possible, using something like ‘`IGNORECASE = 1 && /foObAr/ { ... }`’ and ‘`IGNORECASE = 0 || /foobar/ { ... }`’. However, this is somewhat obscure and we don’t recommend it.

<sup>4</sup> If you don’t understand this, don’t worry about it; it just means that `gawk` does the right thing.

### 3.8 Using Dynamic Regexp

The righthand side of a ‘~’ or ‘!~’ operator need not be a regexp constant (i.e., a string of characters between slashes). It may be any expression. The expression is evaluated and converted to a string if necessary; the contents of the string are then used as the regexp. A regexp computed in this way is called a *dynamic regexp*:

```
BEGIN { digits_regexp = "[[:digit:]]+" }
$0 ~ digits_regexp { print }
```

This sets `digits_regexp` to a regexp that describes one or more digits, and tests whether the input record matches this regexp.

**NOTE:** When using the ‘~’ and ‘!~’ operators, there is a difference between a regexp constant enclosed in slashes and a string constant enclosed in double quotes. If you are going to use a string constant, you have to understand that the string is, in essence, scanned *twice*: the first time when `awk` reads your program, and the second time when it goes to match the string on the lefthand side of the operator with the pattern on the right. This is true of any string-valued expression (such as `digits_regexp`, shown previously), not just string constants.

What difference does it make if the string is scanned twice? The answer has to do with escape sequences, and particularly with backslashes. To get a backslash into a regular expression inside a string, you have to type two backslashes.

For example, `/\*/` is a regexp constant for a literal ‘\*’. Only one backslash is needed. To do the same thing with a string, you have to type `"\*"`. The first backslash escapes the second one so that the string actually contains the two characters ‘\’ and ‘\*’.

Given that you can use both regexp and string constants to describe regular expressions, which should you use? The answer is “regexp constants,” for several reasons:

- String constants are more complicated to write and more difficult to read. Using regexp constants makes your programs less error-prone. Not understanding the difference between the two kinds of constants is a common source of errors.
- It is more efficient to use regexp constants. `awk` can note that you have supplied a regexp and store it internally in a form that makes pattern matching more efficient. When using a string constant, `awk` must first convert the string into this internal form and then perform the pattern matching.
- Using regexp constants is better form; it shows clearly that you intend a regexp match.

#### Advanced Notes: Using \n in Bracket Expressions of Dynamic Regexp

Some commercial versions of `awk` do not allow the newline character to be used inside a bracket expression for a dynamic regexp:

```
$ awk '$0 ~ "[ \t\n]"'
[error] awk: newline in character class [
[error] ]...
[error] source line number 1
[error] context is
[error] >>> <<<
```

But a newline in a regexp constant works with no problem:

```
$ awk '$0 ~ /[ \t\n]/'  
here is a sample line  
+ here is a sample line  
Ctrl-d
```

`gawk` does not have this problem, and it isn't likely to occur often in practice, but it's worth noting for future reference.

## 4 Reading Input Files

In the typical `awk` program, `awk` reads all input either from the standard input (by default, this is the keyboard, but often it is a pipe from another command) or from files whose names you specify on the `awk` command line. If you specify input files, `awk` reads them in order, processing all the data from one before going on to the next. The name of the current input file can be found in the built-in variable `FILENAME` (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126).

The input is read in units called *records*, and is processed by the rules of your program one record at a time. By default, each record is one line. Each record is automatically split into chunks called *fields*. This makes it more convenient for programs to work on the parts of a record.

On rare occasions, you may need to use the `getline` command. The `getline` command is valuable, both because it can do explicit input from any number of files, and because the files used with it do not have to be named on the `awk` command line (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with getline\]](#), page 67).

### 4.1 How Input Is Split into Records

The `awk` utility divides the input for your `awk` program into records and fields. `awk` keeps track of the number of records that have been read so far from the current input file. This value is stored in a built-in variable called `FNR`. It is reset to zero when a new file is started. Another built-in variable, `NR`, records the total number of input records read so far from all data files. It starts at zero, but is never automatically reset to zero.

Records are separated by a character called the *record separator*. By default, the record separator is the newline character. This is why records are, by default, single lines. A different character can be used for the record separator by assigning the character to the built-in variable `RS`.

Like any other variable, the value of `RS` can be changed in the `awk` program with the assignment operator, `=` (see [Section 6.2.3 \[Assignment Expressions\]](#), page 98). The new record-separator character should be enclosed in quotation marks, which indicate a string constant. Often the right time to do this is at the beginning of execution, before any input is processed, so that the very first record is read with the proper separator. To do this, use the special `BEGIN` pattern (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114). For example:

```
awk 'BEGIN { RS = "/" }
     { print $0 }' BBS-list
```

changes the value of `RS` to `/`, before reading any input. This is a string whose first character is a slash; as a result, records are separated by slashes. Then the input file is read, and the second rule in the `awk` program (the action with no pattern) prints each record. Because each `print` statement adds a newline at the end of its output, this `awk` program copies the input with each slash changed to a newline. Here are the results of running the program on `'BBS-list'`:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { RS = "/" }
>     { print $0 }' BBS-list
+ aardvark      555-5553      1200
```

```

+ 300          B
+ alpo-net     555-3412    2400
+ 1200
+ 300      A
+ barfly      555-7685    1200
+ 300          A
+ bites      555-1675    2400
+ 1200
+ 300      A
+ camelot     555-0542    300          C
+ core       555-2912    1200
+ 300          C
+ foey       555-1234    2400
+ 1200
+ 300      B
+ foot       555-6699    1200
+ 300          B
+ macfoo     555-6480    1200
+ 300          A
+ sdace      555-3430    2400
+ 1200
+ 300      A
+ sabafoo    555-2127    1200
+ 300          C
+

```

Note that the entry for the ‘camelot’ BBS is not split. In the original data file (see [Section 1.2 \[Data Files for the Examples\], page 16](#)), the line looks like this:

```
camelot      555-0542    300          C
```

It has one baud rate only, so there are no slashes in the record, unlike the others which have two or more baud rates. In fact, this record is treated as part of the record for the ‘core’ BBS; the newline separating them in the output is the original newline in the data file, not the one added by `awk` when it printed the record!

Another way to change the record separator is on the command line, using the variable-assignment feature (see [Section 2.3 \[Other Command-Line Arguments\], page 30](#)):

```
awk '{ print $0 }' RS="/" BBS-list
```

This sets `RS` to ‘/’ before processing ‘BBS-list’.

Using an unusual character such as ‘/’ for the record separator produces correct behavior in the vast majority of cases. However, the following (extreme) pipeline prints a surprising ‘1’:

```
$ echo | awk 'BEGIN { RS = "a" } ; { print NF }'
+ 1
```

There is one field, consisting of a newline. The value of the built-in variable `NF` is the number of fields in the current record.

Reaching the end of an input file terminates the current input record, even if the last character in the file is not the character in `RS`.



The empty string "" (a string without any characters) has a special meaning as the value of `RS`. It means that records are separated by one or more blank lines and nothing else. See [Section 4.8 \[Multiple-Line Records\]](#), page 64, for more details.

If you change the value of `RS` in the middle of an `awk` run, the new value is used to delimit subsequent records, but the record currently being processed, as well as records already processed, are not affected.

After the end of the record has been determined, `gawk` sets the variable `RT` to the text in the input that matched `RS`.

When using `gawk`, the value of `RS` is not limited to a one-character string. It can be any regular expression (see [Chapter 3 \[Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37). (c.e.) In general, each record ends at the next string that matches the regular expression; the next record starts at the end of the matching string. This general rule is actually at work in the usual case, where `RS` contains just a newline: a record ends at the beginning of the next matching string (the next newline in the input), and the following record starts just after the end of this string (at the first character of the following line). The newline, because it matches `RS`, is not part of either record.

When `RS` is a single character, `RT` contains the same single character. However, when `RS` is a regular expression, `RT` contains the actual input text that matched the regular expression.

If the input file ended without any text that matches `RS`, `gawk` sets `RT` to the null string.

The following example illustrates both of these features. It sets `RS` equal to a regular expression that matches either a newline or a series of one or more uppercase letters with optional leading and/or trailing whitespace:

```
$ echo record 1 AAAA record 2 BBBB record 3 |
> gawk 'BEGIN { RS = "\n| ( *[[[:upper:]]+ *)" }
>         { print "Record =", $0, "and RT =", RT }'
- Record = record 1 and RT = AAAA
- Record = record 2 and RT = BBBB
- Record = record 3 and RT =
-

```

The final line of output has an extra blank line. This is because the value of `RT` is a newline, and the `print` statement supplies its own terminating newline. See [Section 13.3.8 \[A Simple Stream Editor\]](#), page 275, for a more useful example of `RS` as a regexp and `RT`.

If you set `RS` to a regular expression that allows optional trailing text, such as `'RS = "abc(XYZ)?"'` it is possible, due to implementation constraints, that `gawk` may match the leading part of the regular expression, but not the trailing part, particularly if the input text that could match the trailing part is fairly long. `gawk` attempts to avoid this problem, but currently, there's no guarantee that this will never happen.

**NOTE:** Remember that in `awk`, the `'^'` and `'$'` anchor metacharacters match the beginning and end of a *string*, and not the beginning and end of a *line*. As a result, something like `'RS = "^[[[:upper:]]"'` can only match at the beginning of a file. This is because `gawk` views the input file as one long string that happens to contain newline characters in it. It is thus best to avoid anchor characters in the value of `RS`.

The use of `RS` as a regular expression and the `RT` variable are `gawk` extensions; they are not available in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25). In

compatibility mode, only the first character of the value of `RS` is used to determine the end of the record.

### Advanced Notes: `RS = "\0"` Is Not Portable

There are times when you might want to treat an entire data file as a single record. The only way to make this happen is to give `RS` a value that you know doesn't occur in the input file. This is hard to do in a general way, such that a program always works for arbitrary input files.

You might think that for text files, the NUL character, which consists of a character with all bits equal to zero, is a good value to use for `RS` in this case:

```
BEGIN { RS = "\0" } # whole file becomes one record?
```

`gawk` in fact accepts this, and uses the NUL character for the record separator. However, this usage is *not* portable to other `awk` implementations.

All other `awk` implementations<sup>1</sup> store strings internally as C-style strings. C strings use the NUL character as the string terminator. In effect, this means that '`RS = "\0"`' is the same as '`RS = ""`'.

The best way to treat a whole file as a single record is to simply read the file in, one record at a time, concatenating each record onto the end of the previous ones.

## 4.2 Examining Fields

When `awk` reads an input record, the record is automatically *parsed* or separated by the `awk` utility into chunks called *fields*. By default, fields are separated by *whitespace*, like words in a line. Whitespace in `awk` means any string of one or more spaces, TABs, or newlines;<sup>2</sup> other characters, such as formfeed, vertical tab, etc., that are considered whitespace by other languages, are *not* considered whitespace by `awk`.

The purpose of fields is to make it more convenient for you to refer to these pieces of the record. You don't have to use them—you can operate on the whole record if you want—but fields are what make simple `awk` programs so powerful.

A dollar-sign ('\$') is used to refer to a field in an `awk` program, followed by the number of the field you want. Thus, `$1` refers to the first field, `$2` to the second, and so on. (Unlike the Unix shells, the field numbers are not limited to single digits. `$127` is the one hundred twenty-seventh field in the record.) For example, suppose the following is a line of input:

```
This seems like a pretty nice example.
```

Here the first field, or `$1`, is 'This', the second field, or `$2`, is 'seems', and so on. Note that the last field, `$7`, is 'example.'. Because there is no space between the 'e' and the '.', the period is considered part of the seventh field.

`NF` is a built-in variable whose value is the number of fields in the current record. `awk` automatically updates the value of `NF` each time it reads a record. No matter how many fields there are, the last field in a record can be represented by `$NF`. So, `$NF` is the same as `$7`, which is 'example.'. If you try to reference a field beyond the last one (such as `$8` when

<sup>1</sup> At least that we know about.

<sup>2</sup> In POSIX `awk`, newlines are not considered whitespace for separating fields.

the record has only seven fields), you get the empty string. (If used in a numeric operation, you get zero.)

The use of `$0`, which looks like a reference to the “zero-th” field, is a special case: it represents the whole input record when you are not interested in specific fields. Here are some more examples:

```
$ awk '$1 ~ /foo/ { print $0 }' BBS-list
+ foey      555-1234      2400/1200/300      B
+ foot      555-6699      1200/300            B
+ macfoo    555-6480      1200/300            A
+ sabafoo   555-2127      1200/300            C
```

This example prints each record in the file ‘BBS-list’ whose first field contains the string ‘foo’. The operator ‘~’ is called a *matching operator* (see [Section 3.1 \[How to Use Regular Expressions\], page 37](#)); it tests whether a string (here, the field `$1`) matches a given regular expression.

By contrast, the following example looks for ‘foo’ in *the entire record* and prints the first field and the last field for each matching input record:

```
$ awk '/foo/ { print $1, $NF }' BBS-list
+ foey B
+ foot B
+ macfoo A
+ sabafoo C
```

### 4.3 Nonconstant Field Numbers

The number of a field does not need to be a constant. Any expression in the `awk` language can be used after a ‘\$’ to refer to a field. The value of the expression specifies the field number. If the value is a string, rather than a number, it is converted to a number. Consider this example:

```
awk '{ print $NR }'
```

Recall that `NR` is the number of records read so far: one in the first record, two in the second, etc. So this example prints the first field of the first record, the second field of the second record, and so on. For the twentieth record, field number 20 is printed; most likely, the record has fewer than 20 fields, so this prints a blank line. Here is another example of using expressions as field numbers:

```
awk '{ print $(2*2) }' BBS-list
```

`awk` evaluates the expression ‘(2\*2)’ and uses its value as the number of the field to print. The ‘\*’ sign represents multiplication, so the expression ‘2\*2’ evaluates to four. The parentheses are used so that the multiplication is done before the ‘\$’ operation; they are necessary whenever there is a binary operator in the field-number expression. This example, then, prints the hours of operation (the fourth field) for every line of the file ‘BBS-list’. (All of the `awk` operators are listed, in order of decreasing precedence, in [Section 6.5 \[Operator Precedence \(How Operators Nest\)\], page 109](#).)

If the field number you compute is zero, you get the entire record. Thus, ‘\$(2-2)’ has the same value as `$0`. Negative field numbers are not allowed; trying to reference one usually terminates the program. (The POSIX standard does not define what happens when you

reference a negative field number. `gawk` notices this and terminates your program. Other `awk` implementations may behave differently.)

As mentioned in [Section 4.2 \[Examining Fields\], page 52](#), `awk` stores the current record's number of fields in the built-in variable `NF` (also see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\], page 126](#)). The expression `$NF` is not a special feature—it is the direct consequence of evaluating `NF` and using its value as a field number.

## 4.4 Changing the Contents of a Field

The contents of a field, as seen by `awk`, can be changed within an `awk` program; this changes what `awk` perceives as the current input record. (The actual input is untouched; `awk` *never* modifies the input file.) Consider the following example and its output:

```
$ awk '{ nboxes = $3 ; $3 = $3 - 10
>      print nboxes, $3 }' inventory-shipped
+ 25 15
+ 32 22
+ 24 14
...
```

The program first saves the original value of field three in the variable `nboxes`. The ‘-’ sign represents subtraction, so this program reassigns field three, `$3`, as the original value of field three minus ten: ‘`$3 - 10`’. (See [Section 6.2.1 \[Arithmetic Operators\], page 95](#).) Then it prints the original and new values for field three. (Someone in the warehouse made a consistent mistake while inventorying the red boxes.)

For this to work, the text in field `$3` must make sense as a number; the string of characters must be converted to a number for the computer to do arithmetic on it. The number resulting from the subtraction is converted back to a string of characters that then becomes field three. See [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\], page 93](#).

When the value of a field is changed (as perceived by `awk`), the text of the input record is recalculated to contain the new field where the old one was. In other words, `$0` changes to reflect the altered field. Thus, this program prints a copy of the input file, with 10 subtracted from the second field of each line:

```
$ awk '{ $2 = $2 - 10; print $0 }' inventory-shipped
+ Jan 3 25 15 115
+ Feb 5 32 24 226
+ Mar 5 24 34 228
...
```

It is also possible to also assign contents to fields that are out of range. For example:

```
$ awk '{ $6 = ($5 + $4 + $3 + $2)
>      print $6 }' inventory-shipped
+ 168
+ 297
+ 301
...
```

We’ve just created `$6`, whose value is the sum of fields `$2`, `$3`, `$4`, and `$5`. The ‘+’ sign represents addition. For the file ‘`inventory-shipped`’, `$6` represents the total number of parcels shipped for a particular month.

Creating a new field changes `awk`'s internal copy of the current input record, which is the value of `$0`. Thus, if you do `'print $0'` after adding a field, the record printed includes the new field, with the appropriate number of field separators between it and the previously existing fields.

This recomputation affects and is affected by `NF` (the number of fields; see [Section 4.2 \[Examining Fields\]](#), page 52). For example, the value of `NF` is set to the number of the highest field you create. The exact format of `$0` is also affected by a feature that has not been discussed yet: the *output field separator*, `OFS`, used to separate the fields (see [Section 5.3 \[Output Separators\]](#), page 75).

Note, however, that merely *referencing* an out-of-range field does *not* change the value of either `$0` or `NF`. Referencing an out-of-range field only produces an empty string. For example:

```
if ($(NF+1) != "")
    print "can't happen"
else
    print "everything is normal"
```

should print `'everything is normal'`, because `NF+1` is certain to be out of range. (See [Section 7.4.1 \[The if-else Statement\]](#), page 118, for more information about `awk`'s `if-else` statements. See [Section 6.3.2 \[Variable Typing and Comparison Expressions\]](#), page 102, for more information about the `'!='` operator.)

It is important to note that making an assignment to an existing field changes the value of `$0` but does not change the value of `NF`, even when you assign the empty string to a field. For example:

```
$ echo a b c d | awk '{ OFS = ":"; $2 = ""
>                          print $0; print NF }'
└─ a::c:d
└─ 4
```

The field is still there; it just has an empty value, denoted by the two colons between `'a'` and `'c'`. This example shows what happens if you create a new field:

```
$ echo a b c d | awk '{ OFS = ":"; $2 = ""; $6 = "new"
>                          print $0; print NF }'
└─ a::c:d::new
└─ 6
```

The intervening field, `$5`, is created with an empty value (indicated by the second pair of adjacent colons), and `NF` is updated with the value six.

Decrementing `NF` throws away the values of the fields after the new value of `NF` and recomputes `$0`. Here is an example:

```
$ echo a b c d e f | awk '{ print "NF =", NF;
>                          NF = 3; print $0 }'
└─ NF = 6
└─ a b c
```

**CAUTION:** Some versions of `awk` don't rebuild `$0` when `NF` is decremented. Caveat emptor.



Finally, there are times when it is convenient to force `awk` to rebuild the entire record, using the current value of the fields and `OFS`. To do this, use the seemingly innocuous assignment:

```
$1 = $1 # force record to be reconstituted
print $0 # or whatever else with $0
```

This forces `awk` rebuild the record. It does help to add a comment, as we've shown here.

There is a flip side to the relationship between `$0` and the fields. Any assignment to `$0` causes the record to be reparsed into fields using the *current* value of `FS`. This also applies to any built-in function that updates `$0`, such as `sub()` and `gsub()` (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149).

### Advanced Notes: Understanding `$0`

It is important to remember that `$0` is the *full* record, exactly as it was read from the input. This includes any leading or trailing whitespace, and the exact whitespace (or other characters) that separate the fields.

It is a not-uncommon error to try to change the field separators in a record simply by setting `FS` and `OFS`, and then expecting a plain `'print'` or `'print $0'` to print the modified record.

But this does not work, since nothing was done to change the record itself. Instead, you must force the record to be rebuilt, typically with a statement such as `'$1 = $1'`, as described earlier.

## 4.5 Specifying How Fields Are Separated

The *field separator*, which is either a single character or a regular expression, controls the way `awk` splits an input record into fields. `awk` scans the input record for character sequences that match the separator; the fields themselves are the text between the matches.

In the examples that follow, we use the bullet symbol (●) to represent spaces in the output. If the field separator is `'oo'`, then the following line:

```
moo goo gai pan
```

is split into three fields: `'m'`, `'●g'`, and `'●gai●pan'`. Note the leading spaces in the values of the second and third fields.

The field separator is represented by the built-in variable `FS`. Shell programmers take note: `awk` does *not* use the name `IFS` that is used by the POSIX-compliant shells (such as the Unix Bourne shell, `sh`, or `Bash`).

The value of `FS` can be changed in the `awk` program with the assignment operator, `'='` (see [Section 6.2.3 \[Assignment Expressions\]](#), page 98). Often the right time to do this is at the beginning of execution before any input has been processed, so that the very first record is read with the proper separator. To do this, use the special `BEGIN` pattern (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114). For example, here we set the value of `FS` to the string `","`:

```
awk 'BEGIN { FS = "," } ; { print $2 }'
```

Given the input line:

John Q. Smith, 29 Oak St., Walamazoo, MI 42139  
 this `awk` program extracts and prints the string `'•29•Oak•St.'`.

Sometimes the input data contains separator characters that don't separate fields the way you thought they would. For instance, the person's name in the example we just used might have a title or suffix attached, such as:

John Q. Smith, LXIX, 29 Oak St., Walamazoo, MI 42139

The same program would extract `'•LXIX'`, instead of `'•29•Oak•St.'`. If you were expecting the program to print the address, you would be surprised. The moral is to choose your data layout and separator characters carefully to prevent such problems. (If the data is not in a form that is easy to process, perhaps you can massage it first with a separate `awk` program.)

### 4.5.1 Whitespace Normally Separates Fields

Fields are normally separated by whitespace sequences (spaces, TABs, and newlines), not by single spaces. Two spaces in a row do not delimit an empty field. The default value of the field separator `FS` is a string containing a single space, `" "`. If `awk` interpreted this value in the usual way, each space character would separate fields, so two spaces in a row would make an empty field between them. The reason this does not happen is that a single space as the value of `FS` is a special case—it is taken to specify the default manner of delimiting fields.

If `FS` is any other single character, such as `","`, then each occurrence of that character separates two fields. Two consecutive occurrences delimit an empty field. If the character occurs at the beginning or the end of the line, that too delimits an empty field. The space character is the only single character that does not follow these rules.

### 4.5.2 Using Regular Expressions to Separate Fields

The previous subsection discussed the use of single characters or simple strings as the value of `FS`. More generally, the value of `FS` may be a string containing any regular expression. In this case, each match in the record for the regular expression separates fields. For example, the assignment:

```
FS = ", \t"
```

makes every area of an input line that consists of a comma followed by a space and a TAB into a field separator.

For a less trivial example of a regular expression, try using single spaces to separate fields the way single commas are used. `FS` can be set to `"[ ]"` (left bracket, space, right bracket). This regular expression matches a single space and nothing else (see [Chapter 3 \[Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37).

There is an important difference between the two cases of `'FS = " "'` (a single space) and `'FS = "[ \t\n]+'` (a regular expression matching one or more spaces, TABs, or newlines). For both values of `FS`, fields are separated by *runs* (multiple adjacent occurrences) of spaces, TABs, and/or newlines. However, when the value of `FS` is `" "`, `awk` first strips leading and trailing whitespace from the record and then decides where the fields are. For example, the following pipeline prints `'b'`:

```
$ echo ' a b c d ' | awk '{ print $2 }'  
→ b
```

However, this pipeline prints `'a'` (note the extra spaces around each letter):

```
$ echo ' a b c d ' | awk 'BEGIN { FS = "[\t\n]+" }
>                               { print $2 }'
└ a
```

In this case, the first field is *null* or empty.

The stripping of leading and trailing whitespace also comes into play whenever `$0` is recomputed. For instance, study this pipeline:

```
$ echo '  a b c d ' | awk '{ print; $2 = $2; print }'
└   a b c d
└ a b c d
```

The first `print` statement prints the record as it was read, with leading whitespace intact. The assignment to `$2` rebuilds `$0` by concatenating `$1` through `$NF` together, separated by the value of `OFS`. Because the leading whitespace was ignored when finding `$1`, it is not part of the new `$0`. Finally, the last `print` statement prints the new `$0`.

There is an additional subtlety to be aware of when using regular expressions for field splitting. It is not well-specified in the POSIX standard, or anywhere else, what ‘`^`’ means when splitting fields. Does the ‘`^`’ match only at the beginning of the entire record? Or is each field separator a new string? It turns out that different `awk` versions answer this question differently, and you should not rely on any specific behavior in your programs.

As a point of information, Brian Kernighan’s `awk` allows ‘`^`’ to match only at the beginning of the record. `gawk` also works this way. For example:

```
$ echo 'xxAA  xxBxx  C' |
> gawk -F ' (^x+)|( +)' '{ for (i = 1; i <= NF; i++)
>                               printf "-->%s<--\n", $i }'
└ --><--
└ -->AA<--
└ -->xxBxx<--
└ -->C<--
```

### 4.5.3 Making Each Character a Separate Field

There are times when you may want to examine each character of a record separately. This can be done in `gawk` by simply assigning the null string (“”) to `FS`. (c.e.) In this case, each individual character in the record becomes a separate field. For example:

```
$ echo a b | gawk 'BEGIN { FS = "" }
>                               {
>                               for (i = 1; i <= NF; i = i + 1)
>                                 print "Field", i, "is", $i
>                               }'
└ Field 1 is a
└ Field 2 is
└ Field 3 is b
```

Traditionally, the behavior of `FS` equal to “” was not defined. In this case, most versions of Unix `awk` simply treat the entire record as only having one field. In compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\], page 25](#)), if `FS` is the null string, then `gawk` also behaves this way.

#### 4.5.4 Setting FS from the Command Line

FS can be set on the command line. Use the `-F` option to do so. For example:

```
awk -F, 'program' input-files
```

sets FS to the `,` character. Notice that the option uses an uppercase `F` instead of a lowercase `f`. The latter option (`-f`) specifies a file containing an `awk` program. Case is significant in command-line options: the `-F` and `-f` options have nothing to do with each other. You can use both options at the same time to set the FS variable *and* get an `awk` program from a file.

The value used for the argument to `-F` is processed in exactly the same way as assignments to the built-in variable FS. Any special characters in the field separator must be escaped appropriately. For example, to use a `\` as the field separator on the command line, you would have to type:

```
# same as FS = "\\\"
awk -F\\ \\ '...' files ...
```

Because `\` is used for quoting in the shell, `awk` sees `-F\\`. Then `awk` processes the `\\` for escape characters (see [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), page 38), finally yielding a single `\` to use for the field separator.

As a special case, in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), if the argument to `-F` is `t`, then FS is set to the TAB character. If you type `-F\t` at the shell, without any quotes, the `\` gets deleted, so `awk` figures that you really want your fields to be separated with TABs and not `t`'s. Use `-v FS="t"` or `-F"[t]"` on the command line if you really do want to separate your fields with `t`'s.

As an example, let's use an `awk` program file called `baud.awk` that contains the pattern `/300/` and the action `print $1`:

```
/300/ { print $1 }
```

Let's also set FS to be the `-` character and run the program on the file `BBS-list`. The following command prints a list of the names of the bulletin boards that operate at 300 baud and the first three digits of their phone numbers:

```
$ awk -F- -f baud.awk BBS-list
-| aardvark      555
-| alpo
-| barfly       555
-| bites        555
-| camelot     555
-| core         555
-| foey        555
-| foot         555
-| macfoo      555
-| sdace       555
-| sabafoo     555
```

Note the second line of output. The second line in the original file looked like this:

```
alpo-net      555-3412      2400/1200/300      A
```

The ‘-’ as part of the system’s name was used as the field separator, instead of the ‘-’ in the phone number that was originally intended. This demonstrates why you have to be careful in choosing your field and record separators.

Perhaps the most common use of a single character as the field separator occurs when processing the Unix system password file. On many Unix systems, each user has a separate entry in the system password file, one line per user. The information in these lines is separated by colons. The first field is the user’s login name and the second is the user’s (encrypted or shadow) password. A password file entry might look like this:

```
arnold:xyzy:2076:10:Arnold Robbins:/home/arnold:/bin/bash
```

The following program searches the system password file and prints the entries for users who have no password:

```
awk -F: '$2 == ""' /etc/passwd
```

### 4.5.5 Field-Splitting Summary

It is important to remember that when you assign a string constant as the value of `FS`, it undergoes normal `awk` string processing. For example, with Unix `awk` and `gawk`, the assignment `FS = "\. ."` assigns the character string `". ."` to `FS` (the backslash is stripped). This creates a regexp meaning “fields are separated by occurrences of any two characters.” If instead you want fields to be separated by a literal period followed by any single character, use `FS = "\\ ."`.

The following table summarizes how fields are split, based on the value of `FS` (‘==’ means “is equal to”):

`FS == " "` Fields are separated by runs of whitespace. Leading and trailing whitespace are ignored. This is the default.

`FS == any other single character`

Fields are separated by each occurrence of the character. Multiple successive occurrences delimit empty fields, as do leading and trailing occurrences. The character can even be a regexp metacharacter; it does not need to be escaped.

`FS == regexp`

Fields are separated by occurrences of characters that match *regexp*. Leading and trailing matches of *regexp* delimit empty fields.

`FS == ""` Each individual character in the record becomes a separate field. (This is a `gawk` extension; it is not specified by the POSIX standard.)

### Advanced Notes: Changing FS Does Not Affect the Fields

According to the POSIX standard, `awk` is supposed to behave as if each record is split into fields at the time it is read. In particular, this means that if you change the value of `FS` after a record is read, the value of the fields (i.e., how they were split) should reflect the old value of `FS`, not the new one.

However, many older implementations of `awk` do not work this way. Instead, they defer splitting the fields until a field is actually referenced. The fields are split using the *current* value of `FS`! This behavior can be difficult to diagnose. The following example illustrates



the difference between the two methods. (The `sed`<sup>3</sup> command prints just the first line of `/etc/passwd`.)

```
sed 1q /etc/passwd | awk '{ FS = ":" ; print $1 }'
```

which usually prints:

```
root
```

on an incorrect implementation of `awk`, while `gawk` prints something like:

```
root:nSijPlPhZZwgE:0:0:Root:/:
```

### Advanced Notes: FS and IGNORECASE

The `IGNORECASE` variable (see [Section 7.5.1 \[Built-in Variables That Control awk\]](#), page 127) affects field splitting *only* when the value of `FS` is a regexp. It has no effect when `FS` is a single character, even if that character is a letter. Thus, in the following code:

```
FS = "c"
IGNORECASE = 1
$0 = "aCa"
print $1
```

The output is `'aCa'`. If you really want to split fields on an alphabetic character while ignoring case, use a regexp that will do it for you. E.g., `'FS = "[c]"`. In this case, `IGNORECASE` will take effect.

## 4.6 Reading Fixed-Width Data

**NOTE:** This section discusses an advanced feature of `gawk`. If you are a novice `awk` user, you might want to skip it on the first reading.

`gawk` provides a facility for dealing with fixed-width fields with no distinctive field separator. For example, data of this nature arises in the input for old Fortran programs where numbers are run together, or in the output of programs that did not anticipate the use of their output as input for other programs.

An example of the latter is a table where all the columns are lined up by the use of a variable number of spaces and *empty fields are just spaces*. Clearly, `awk`'s normal field splitting based on `FS` does not work well in this case. Although a portable `awk` program can use a series of `substr()` calls on `$0` (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149), this is awkward and inefficient for a large number of fields.

The splitting of an input record into fixed-width fields is specified by assigning a string containing space-separated numbers to the built-in variable `FIELDWIDTHS`. Each number specifies the width of the field, *including* columns between fields. If you want to ignore the columns between fields, you can specify the width as a separate field that is subsequently ignored. It is a fatal error to supply a field width that is not a positive number. The following data is the output of the Unix `w` utility. It is useful to illustrate the use of `FIELDWIDTHS`:

---

<sup>3</sup> The `sed` utility is a “stream editor.” Its behavior is also defined by the POSIX standard.

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```
10:06pm up 21 days, 14:04, 23 users
User      tty      login  idle   JCPU   PCPU   what
hzuo      ttyV0    8:58pm      9       5   vi p24.tex
hzang     ttyV3    6:37pm    50          -csh
eklye     ttyV5    9:53pm      7       1   em thes.tex
dportein  ttyV6    8:17pm    1:47          -csh
gierd     ttyD3    10:00pm     1          elm
dave      ttyD4    9:47pm      4       4   w
brent     tty0     26Jun91  4:46  26:46  4:41  bash
dave      ttyq4    26Jun91 15days  46      46  wnewmail
```

The following program takes the above input, converts the idle time to number of seconds, and prints out the first two fields and the calculated idle time:

**NOTE:** This program uses a number of `awk` features that haven't been introduced yet.

```
BEGIN { FIELDWIDTHS = "9 6 10 6 7 7 35" }
NR > 2 {
    idle = $4
    sub(/^ */, "", idle) # strip leading spaces
    if (idle == "")
        idle = 0
    if (idle ~ /:/) {
        split(idle, t, ":")
        idle = t[1] * 60 + t[2]
    }
    if (idle ~ /days/)
        idle *= 24 * 60 * 60

    print $1, $2, idle
}
```

Running the program on the data produces the following results:

```
hzuo      ttyV0  0
hzang     ttyV3  50
eklye     ttyV5  0
dportein  ttyV6  107
gierd     ttyD3  1
dave      ttyD4  0
brent     tty0   286
dave      ttyq4  1296000
```

Another (possibly more practical) example of fixed-width input data is the input from a deck of balloting cards. In some parts of the United States, voters mark their choices by punching holes in computer cards. These cards are then processed to count the votes for any particular candidate or on any particular issue. Because a voter may choose not to vote on some issue, any column on the card may be empty. An `awk` program for processing such data could use the `FIELDWIDTHS` feature to simplify reading the data. (Of course, getting `gawk` to run on a system with card readers is another story!)

Assigning a value to `FS` causes `gawk` to use `FS` for field splitting again. Use `'FS = FS'` to make this happen, without having to know the current value of `FS`. In order to tell which kind of field splitting is in effect, use `PROCINFO["FS"]` (see [Section 7.5.2 \[Built-in Variables That Convey Information\]](#), page 129). The value is `"FS"` if regular field splitting is being used, or it is `"FIELDWIDTHS"` if fixed-width field splitting is being used:

```
if (PROCINFO["FS"] == "FS")
    regular field splitting ...
else if (PROCINFO["FS"] == "FIELDWIDTHS")
    fixed-width field splitting ...
else
    content-based field splitting ... (see next section)
```

This information is useful when writing a function that needs to temporarily change `FS` or `FIELDWIDTHS`, read some records, and then restore the original settings (see [Section 12.5 \[Reading the User Database\]](#), page 230, for an example of such a function).

## 4.7 Defining Fields By Content

**NOTE:** This section discusses an advanced feature of `gawk`. If you are a novice `awk` user, you might want to skip it on the first reading.

Normally, when using `FS`, `gawk` defines the fields as the parts of the record that occur in between each field separator. In other words, `FS` defines what a field *is not*, instead of what a field *is*. However, there are times when you really want to define the fields by what they are, and not by what they are not.

The most notorious such case is so-called *comma separated value* (CSV) data. Many spreadsheet programs, for example, can export their data into text files, where each record is terminated with a newline, and fields are separated by commas. If only commas separated the data, there wouldn't be an issue. The problem comes when one of the fields contains an *embedded* comma. While there is no formal standard specification for CSV data<sup>4</sup>, in such cases, most programs embed the field in double quotes. So we might have data like this:

```
Robbins,Arnold,"1234 A Pretty Street, NE",MyTown,MyState,12345-6789,USA
```

The `FPAT` variable offers a solution for cases like this. The value of `FPAT` should be a string that provides a regular expression. This regular expression describes the contents of each field.

In the case of CSV data as presented above, each field is either “anything that is not a comma,” or “a double quote, anything that is not a double quote, and a closing double quote.” If written as a regular expression constant (see [Chapter 3 \[Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37), we would have `/([^\,]+)|("[^"]+")/`. Writing this as a string requires us to escape the double quotes, leading to:

```
FPAT = "([^\,]+)|(\"[^\"]+\")"
```

Putting this to use, here is a simple program to parse the data:

```
BEGIN {
    FPAT = "([^\,]+)|(\"[^\"]+\")"
}
```

---

<sup>4</sup> At least, we don't know of one.

```

{
    print "NF = ", NF
    for (i = 1; i <= NF; i++) {
        printf("%d = <%s>\n", i, $i)
    }
}

```

When run, we get the following:

```

$ gawk -f simple-csv.awk addresses.csv
NF = 7
$1 = <Robbins>
$2 = <Arnold>
$3 = <"1234 A Pretty Street, NE">
$4 = <MyTown>
$5 = <MyState>
$6 = <12345-6789>
$7 = <USA>

```

Note the embedded comma in the value of \$3.

A straightforward improvement when processing CSV data of this sort would be to remove the quotes when they occur, with something like this:

```

if (substr($i, 1, 1) == "\"") {
    len = length($i)
    $i = substr($i, 2, len - 2)    # Get text within the two quotes
}

```

As with FS, the IGNORECASE variable (see [Section 7.5.1 \[Built-in Variables That Control awk\], page 127](#)) affects field splitting with FPAT.

Similar to FIELDWIDTHS, the value of PROCINFO["FS"] will be "FPAT" if content-based field splitting is being used.

**NOTE:** Some programs export CSV data that contains embedded newlines between the double quotes. `gawk` provides no way to deal with this. Since there is no formal specification for CSV data, there isn't much more to be done; the FPAT mechanism provides an elegant solution for the majority of cases, and the `gawk` maintainer is satisfied with that.

As written, the regexp used for FPAT requires that each field have a least one character. A straightforward modification (changing changed the first '+' to '\*') allows fields to be empty:

```
FPAT = "([^\,]*)|(\"[^\"]+\")"
```

Finally, the `patsplit()` function makes the same functionality available for splitting regular strings (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\], page 149](#)).

## 4.8 Multiple-Line Records

In some databases, a single line cannot conveniently hold all the information in one entry. In such cases, you can use multiline records. The first step in doing this is to choose your data format.

One technique is to use an unusual character or string to separate records. For example, you could use the formfeed character (written ‘\f’ in `awk`, as in C) to separate them, making each record a page of the file. To do this, just set the variable `RS` to “\f” (a string containing the formfeed character). Any other character could equally well be used, as long as it won’t be part of the data in a record.

Another technique is to have blank lines separate records. By a special dispensation, an empty string as the value of `RS` indicates that records are separated by one or more blank lines. When `RS` is set to the empty string, each record always ends at the first blank line encountered. The next record doesn’t start until the first nonblank line that follows. No matter how many blank lines appear in a row, they all act as one record separator. (Blank lines must be completely empty; lines that contain only whitespace do not count.)

You can achieve the same effect as ‘`RS = ""`’ by assigning the string “\n\n+” to `RS`. This regexp matches the newline at the end of the record and one or more blank lines after the record. In addition, a regular expression always matches the longest possible sequence when there is a choice (see [Section 3.7 \[How Much Text Matches?\]](#), page 46). So the next record doesn’t start until the first nonblank line that follows—no matter how many blank lines appear in a row, they are considered one record separator.

There is an important difference between ‘`RS = ""`’ and ‘`RS = "\n\n+”`’. In the first case, leading newlines in the input data file are ignored, and if a file ends without extra blank lines after the last record, the final newline is removed from the record. In the second case, this special processing is not done.



Now that the input is separated into records, the second step is to separate the fields in the record. One way to do this is to divide each of the lines into fields in the normal manner. This happens by default as the result of a special feature. When `RS` is set to the empty string, *and* `FS` is set to a single character, the newline character *always* acts as a field separator. This is in addition to whatever field separations result from `FS`.<sup>5</sup>

The original motivation for this special exception was probably to provide useful behavior in the default case (i.e., `FS` is equal to “ ”). This feature can be a problem if you really don’t want the newline character to separate fields, because there is no way to prevent it. However, you can work around this by using the `split()` function to break up the record manually (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). If you have a single character field separator, you can work around the special feature in a different way, by making `FS` into a regexp for that single character. For example, if the field separator is a percent character, instead of ‘`FS = "%”`’, use ‘`FS = "[%]”`’.

Another way to separate fields is to put each field on a separate line: to do this, just set the variable `FS` to the string “\n”. (This single character separator matches a single newline.) A practical example of a data file organized this way might be a mailing list, where each entry is separated by blank lines. Consider a mailing list in a file named ‘`addresses`’, which looks like this:

```
Jane Doe
123 Main Street
Anywhere, SE 12345-6789
```

<sup>5</sup> When `FS` is the null string (“”) or a regexp, this special feature of `RS` does not apply. It does apply to the default field separator of a single space: ‘`FS = " ”`’.

```

John Smith
456 Tree-lined Avenue
Smallville, MW 98765-4321
...

```

A simple program to process this file is as follows:

```

# addr.s.awk --- simple mailing list program

# Records are separated by blank lines.
# Each line is one field.
BEGIN { RS = "" ; FS = "\n" }

{
    print "Name is:", $1
    print "Address is:", $2
    print "City and State are:", $3
    print ""
}

```

Running the program produces the following output:

```

$ awk -f addr.s.awk addresses
- Name is: Jane Doe
- Address is: 123 Main Street
- City and State are: Anywhere, SE 12345-6789
-
- Name is: John Smith
- Address is: 456 Tree-lined Avenue
- City and State are: Smallville, MW 98765-4321
-
...

```

See [Section 13.3.4 \[Printing Mailing Labels\]](#), page 267, for a more realistic program that deals with address lists. The following table summarizes how records are split, based on the value of `RS`:

`RS == "\n"`

Records are separated by the newline character (`'\n'`). In effect, every line in the data file is a separate record, including blank lines. This is the default.

`RS == any single character`

Records are separated by each occurrence of the character. Multiple successive occurrences delimit empty records.

`RS == ""`

Records are separated by runs of blank lines. When `FS` is a single character, then the newline character always serves as a field separator, in addition to whatever value `FS` may have. Leading and trailing newlines in a file are ignored.

`RS == regexp`

Records are separated by occurrences of characters that match *regexp*. Leading and trailing matches of *regexp* delimit empty records. (This is a *gawk* extension; it is not specified by the POSIX standard.)

In all cases, `gawk` sets `RT` to the input text that matched the value specified by `RS`. But if the input file ended without any text that matches `RS`, then `gawk` sets `RT` to the null string.

## 4.9 Explicit Input with `getline`

So far we have been getting our input data from `awk`'s main input stream—either the standard input (usually your terminal, sometimes the output from another program) or from the files specified on the command line. The `awk` language has a special built-in command called `getline` that can be used to read input under your explicit control.

The `getline` command is used in several different ways and should *not* be used by beginners. The examples that follow the explanation of the `getline` command include material that has not been covered yet. Therefore, come back and study the `getline` command *after* you have reviewed the rest of this book and have a good knowledge of how `awk` works.

The `getline` command returns one if it finds a record and zero if it encounters the end of the file. If there is some error in getting a record, such as a file that cannot be opened, then `getline` returns `-1`. In this case, `gawk` sets the variable `ERRNO` to a string describing the error that occurred.

In the following examples, *command* stands for a string value that represents a shell command.

**NOTE:** When `--sandbox` is specified (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), reading lines from files, pipes and coprocesses is disabled.

### 4.9.1 Using `getline` with No Arguments

The `getline` command can be used without arguments to read input from the current input file. All it does in this case is read the next input record and split it up into fields. This is useful if you've finished processing the current record, but want to do some special processing on the next record *right now*. For example:

```
{
    if ((t = index($0, "/*")) != 0) {
        # value of 'tmp' will be "" if t is 1
        tmp = substr($0, 1, t - 1)
        u = index(substr($0, t + 2), "*/")
        offset = t + 2
        while (u == 0) {
            if (getline <= 0) {
                m = "unexpected EOF or error"
                m = (m ": " ERRNO)
                print m > "/dev/stderr"
                exit
            }
            u = index($0, "*/")
            offset = 0
        }
        # substr() expression will be "" if */
        # occurred at end of line
    }
}
```

```

        $0 = tmp substr($0, offset + u + 2)
    }
    print $0
}

```

This `awk` program deletes C-style comments (`/* ... */`) from the input. By replacing the `print $0` with other statements, you could perform more complicated processing on the uncommented input, such as searching for matches of a regular expression. (This program has a subtle problem—it does not work if one comment ends and another begins on the same line.)

This form of the `getline` command sets `NF`, `NR`, `FNR`, and the value of `$0`.

**NOTE:** The new value of `$0` is used to test the patterns of any subsequent rules. The original value of `$0` that triggered the rule that executed `getline` is lost. By contrast, the `next` statement reads a new record but immediately begins processing it normally, starting with the first rule in the program. See [Section 7.4.8 \[The next Statement\], page 124](#).

## 4.9.2 Using `getline` into a Variable

You can use `getline var` to read the next record from `awk`'s input into the variable `var`. No other processing is done. For example, suppose the next line is a comment or a special string, and you want to read it without triggering any rules. This form of `getline` allows you to read that line and store it in a variable so that the main read-a-line-and-check-each-rule loop of `awk` never sees it. The following example swaps every two lines of input:

```

{
    if ((getline tmp) > 0) {
        print tmp
        print $0
    } else
        print $0
}

```

It takes the following list:

```

wan
tew
free
phore

```

and produces these results:

```

tew
wan
phore
free

```

The `getline` command used in this way sets only the variables `NR` and `FNR` (and of course, `var`). The record is not split into fields, so the values of the fields (including `$0`) and the value of `NF` do not change.

### 4.9.3 Using `getline` from a File

Use `'getline < file'` to read the next record from *file*. Here *file* is a string-valued expression that specifies the file name. `< file` is called a *redirection* because it directs input to come from a different place. For example, the following program reads its input record from the file `'secondary.input'` when it encounters a first field with a value equal to 10 in the current input file:

```
{
    if ($1 == 10) {
        getline < "secondary.input"
        print
    } else
        print
}
```

Because the main input stream is not used, the values of `NR` and `FNR` are not changed. However, the record it reads is split into fields in the normal manner, so the values of `$0` and the other fields are changed, resulting in a new value of `NF`.

According to POSIX, `'getline < expression'` is ambiguous if *expression* contains unparenthesized operators other than `'$'`; for example, `'getline < dir "/" file'` is ambiguous because the concatenation operator is not parenthesized. You should write it as `'getline < (dir "/" file)'` if you want your program to be portable to all `awk` implementations.

### 4.9.4 Using `getline` into a Variable from a File

Use `'getline var < file'` to read input from the file *file*, and put it in the variable *var*. As above, *file* is a string-valued expression that specifies the file from which to read.

In this version of `getline`, none of the built-in variables are changed and the record is not split into fields. The only variable changed is *var*.<sup>6</sup> For example, the following program copies all the input files to the output, except for records that say `'@include filename'`. Such a record is replaced by the contents of the file *filename*:

```
{
    if (NF == 2 && $1 == "@include") {
        while ((getline line < $2) > 0)
            print line
        close($2)
    } else
        print
}
```

Note here how the name of the extra input file is not built into the program; it is taken directly from the data, specifically from the second field on the `'@include'` line.

The `close()` function is called to ensure that if two identical `'@include'` lines appear in the input, the entire specified file is included twice. See [Section 5.8 \[Closing Input and Output Redirections\]](#), page 86.

One deficiency of this program is that it does not process nested `'@include'` statements (i.e., `'@include'` statements in included files) the way a true macro preprocessor would. See

<sup>6</sup> This is not quite true. `RT` could be changed if `RS` is a regular expression.

Section 13.3.9 [An Easy Way to Use Library Functions], page 276, for a program that does handle nested '@include' statements.

#### 4.9.5 Using getline from a Pipe

The output of a command can also be piped into `getline`, using '`command | getline`'. In this case, the string `command` is run as a shell command and its output is piped into `awk` to be used as input. This form of `getline` reads one record at a time from the pipe. For example, the following program copies its input to its output, except for lines that begin with '@execute', which are replaced by the output produced by running the rest of the line as a shell command:

```
{
    if ($1 == "@execute") {
        tmp = substr($0, 10)      # Remove "@execute"
        while ((tmp | getline) > 0)
            print
        close(tmp)
    } else
        print
}
```

The `close()` function is called to ensure that if two identical '@execute' lines appear in the input, the command is run for each one. Given the input:

```
foo
bar
baz
@execute who
bletch
```

the program might produce:

```
foo
bar
baz
arnold      ttyv0   Jul 13 14:22
miriam      ttyp0   Jul 13 14:23      (murphy:0)
bill        ttyp1   Jul 13 14:23      (murphy:0)
bletch
```

Notice that this program ran the command `who` and printed the previous result. (If you try this program yourself, you will of course get different results, depending upon who is logged in on your system.)

This variation of `getline` splits the record into fields, sets the value of `NF`, and recomputes the value of `$0`. The values of `NR` and `FNR` are not changed.

According to POSIX, '`expression | getline`' is ambiguous if `expression` contains unparenthesized operators other than '\$'—for example, '`"echo " "date" | getline`' is ambiguous because the concatenation operator is not parenthesized. You should write it as '`("echo " "date") | getline`' if you want your program to be portable to all `awk` implementations.

**NOTE:** Unfortunately, `gawk` has not been consistent in its treatment of a construct like `"echo " "date" | getline`. Most versions, including the current version, treat it as `("echo " "date") | getline`. (This how Brian Kernighan's `awk` behaves.) Some versions changed and treated it as `"echo " ("date" | getline)`. (This is how `mawk` behaves.) In short, *always* use explicit parentheses, and then you won't have to worry.

#### 4.9.6 Using `getline` into a Variable from a Pipe

When you use `'command | getline var'`, the output of `command` is sent through a pipe to `getline` and into the variable `var`. For example, the following program reads the current date and time into the variable `current_time`, using the `date` utility, and then prints it:

```
BEGIN {
    "date" | getline current_time
    close("date")
    print "Report printed on " current_time
}
```

In this version of `getline`, none of the built-in variables are changed and the record is not split into fields.

#### 4.9.7 Using `getline` from a Coprocess

Input into `getline` from a pipe is a one-way operation. The command that is started with `'command | getline'` only sends data *to* your `awk` program.

On occasion, you might want to send data to another program for processing and then read the results back. `gawk` allows you to start a *coprocess*, with which two-way communications are possible. This is done with the `'|&'` operator. Typically, you write data to the coprocess first and then read results back, as shown in the following:

```
print "some query" |& "db_server"
"db_server" |& getline
```

which sends a query to `db_server` and then reads the results.

The values of `NR` and `FNR` are not changed, because the main input stream is not used. However, the record is split into fields in the normal manner, thus changing the values of `$0`, of the other fields, and of `NF`.

Coprocesses are an advanced feature. They are discussed here only because this is the section on `getline`. See [Section 11.3 \[Two-Way Communications with Another Process\]](#), [page 203](#), where coprocesses are discussed in more detail.

#### 4.9.8 Using `getline` into a Variable from a Coprocess

When you use `'command |& getline var'`, the output from the coprocess `command` is sent through a two-way pipe to `getline` and into the variable `var`.

In this version of `getline`, none of the built-in variables are changed and the record is not split into fields. The only variable changed is `var`.

#### 4.9.9 Points to Remember About `getline`

Here are some miscellaneous points about `getline` that you should bear in mind:

- When `getline` changes the value of `$0` and `NF`, `awk` does *not* automatically jump to the start of the program and start testing the new record against every pattern. However, the new record is tested against any subsequent rules.
- Many `awk` implementations limit the number of pipelines that an `awk` program may have open to just one. In `gawk`, there is no such limit. You can open as many pipelines (and coprocesses) as the underlying operating system permits.
- An interesting side effect occurs if you use `getline` without a redirection inside a `BEGIN` rule. Because an unredirected `getline` reads from the command-line data files, the first `getline` command causes `awk` to set the value of `FILENAME`. Normally, `FILENAME` does not have a value inside `BEGIN` rules, because you have not yet started to process the command-line data files. (See [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114, also see [Section 7.5.2 \[Built-in Variables That Convey Information\]](#), page 129.)
- Using `FILENAME` with `getline` (`'getline < FILENAME'`) is likely to be a source for confusion. `awk` opens a separate input stream from the current input file. However, by not using a variable, `$0` and `NR` are still updated. If you're doing this, it's probably by accident, and you should reconsider what it is you're trying to accomplish.
- [Section 4.9.10 \[Summary of getline Variants\]](#), page 72, presents a table summarizing the `getline` variants and which variables they can affect. It is worth noting that those variants which do not use redirection can cause `FILENAME` to be updated if they cause `awk` to start reading a new input file.



#### 4.9.10 Summary of `getline` Variants

[Table 4.1](#) summarizes the eight variants of `getline`, listing which built-in variables are set by each one, and whether the variant is standard or a `gawk` extension.

Variant	Effect	Standard / Extension
<code>getline</code>	Sets <code>\$0</code> , <code>NF</code> , <code>FNR</code> , and <code>NR</code>	Standard
<code>getline var</code>	Sets <code>var</code> , <code>FNR</code> , and <code>NR</code>	Standard
<code>getline &lt; file</code>	Sets <code>\$0</code> and <code>NF</code>	Standard
<code>getline var &lt; file</code>	Sets <code>var</code>	Standard
<code>command   getline</code>	Sets <code>\$0</code> and <code>NF</code>	Standard
<code>command   getline var</code>	Sets <code>var</code>	Standard
<code>command  &amp; getline</code>	Sets <code>\$0</code> and <code>NF</code>	Extension
<code>command  &amp; getline var</code>	Sets <code>var</code>	Extension

Table 4.1: `getline` Variants and What They Set

## 4.10 Directories On The Command Line

According to the POSIX standard, files named on the `awk` command line must be text files. It is a fatal error if they are not. Most versions of `awk` treat a directory on the command line as a fatal error.

By default, `gawk` produces a warning for a directory on the command line, but otherwise ignores it. If either of the `'--posix'` or `'--traditional'` options is given, then `gawk` reverts to treating a directory on the command line as a fatal error.

## 5 Printing Output

One of the most common programming actions is to *print*, or output, some or all of the input. Use the `print` statement for simple output, and the `printf` statement for fancier formatting. The `print` statement is not limited when computing *which* values to print. However, with two exceptions, you cannot specify *how* to print them—how many columns, whether to use exponential notation or not, and so on. (For the exceptions, see [Section 5.3 \[Output Separators\]](#), page 75, and [Section 5.4 \[Controlling Numeric Output with print\]](#), page 75.) For printing with specifications, you need the `printf` statement (see [Section 5.5 \[Using printf Statements for Fancier Printing\]](#), page 76).

Besides basic and formatted printing, this chapter also covers I/O redirections to files and pipes, introduces the special file names that `gawk` processes internally, and discusses the `close()` built-in function.

### 5.1 The print Statement

The `print` statement is used for producing output with simple, standardized formatting. Specify only the strings or numbers to print, in a list separated by commas. They are output, separated by single spaces, followed by a newline. The statement looks like this:

```
print item1, item2, ...
```

The entire list of items may be optionally enclosed in parentheses. The parentheses are necessary if any of the item expressions uses the `>` relational operator; otherwise it could be confused with an output redirection (see [Section 5.6 \[Redirecting Output of print and printf\]](#), page 81).

The items to print can be constant strings or numbers, fields of the current record (such as `$1`), variables, or any `awk` expression. Numeric values are converted to strings and then printed.

The simple statement `print` with no items is equivalent to `print $0`: it prints the entire current record. To print a blank line, use `print ""`, where `""` is the empty string. To print a fixed piece of text, use a string constant, such as `"Don't Panic"`, as one item. If you forget to use the double-quote characters, your text is taken as an `awk` expression, and you will probably get an error. Keep in mind that a space is printed between any two items.

### 5.2 print Statement Examples

Each `print` statement makes at least one line of output. However, it isn't limited to only one line. If an item value is a string containing a newline, the newline is output along with the rest of the string. A single `print` statement can make any number of lines this way.

The following is an example of printing a string that contains embedded newlines (the `\n` is an escape sequence, used to represent the newline character; see [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), page 38):

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { print "line one\nline two\nline three" }'
+ line one
+ line two
+ line three
```

The next example, which is run on the ‘inventory-shipped’ file, prints the first two fields of each input record, with a space between them:

```
$ awk '{ print $1, $2 }' inventory-shipped
+ Jan 13
+ Feb 15
+ Mar 15
...
```

A common mistake in using the `print` statement is to omit the comma between two items. This often has the effect of making the items run together in the output, with no space. The reason for this is that juxtaposing two string expressions in `awk` means to concatenate them. Here is the same program, without the comma:

```
$ awk '{ print $1 $2 }' inventory-shipped
+ Jan13
+ Feb15
+ Mar15
...
```

To someone unfamiliar with the ‘inventory-shipped’ file, neither example’s output makes much sense. A heading line at the beginning would make it clearer. Let’s add some headings to our table of months (\$1) and green crates shipped (\$2). We do this using the `BEGIN` pattern (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114) so that the headings are only printed once:

```
awk 'BEGIN { print "Month Crates"
            print "-----" }
     { print $1, $2 }' inventory-shipped
```

When run, the program prints the following:

```
Month Crates
-----
Jan 13
Feb 15
Mar 15
...
```

The only problem, however, is that the headings and the table data don’t line up! We can fix this by printing some spaces between the two fields:

```
awk 'BEGIN { print "Month Crates"
            print "-----" }
     { print $1, "    ", $2 }' inventory-shipped
```

Lining up columns this way can get pretty complicated when there are many columns to fix. Counting spaces for two or three columns is simple, but any more than this can take up a lot of time. This is why the `printf` statement was created (see [Section 5.5 \[Using printf Statements for Fancier Printing\]](#), page 76); one of its specialties is lining up columns of data.

**NOTE:** You can continue either a `print` or `printf` statement simply by putting a newline after any comma (see [Section 1.6 \[awk Statements Versus Lines\]](#), page 21).

### 5.3 Output Separators

As mentioned previously, a `print` statement contains a list of items separated by commas. In the output, the items are normally separated by single spaces. However, this doesn't need to be the case; a single space is simply the default. Any string of characters may be used as the *output field separator* by setting the built-in variable `OFS`. The initial value of this variable is the string " "—that is, a single space.

The output from an entire `print` statement is called an *output record*. Each `print` statement outputs one output record, and then outputs a string called the *output record separator* (or `ORS`). The initial value of `ORS` is the string `"\n"`; i.e., a newline character. Thus, each `print` statement normally makes a separate line.

In order to change how output fields and records are separated, assign new values to the variables `OFS` and `ORS`. The usual place to do this is in the `BEGIN` rule (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114), so that it happens before any input is processed. It can also be done with assignments on the command line, before the names of the input files, or using the `-v` command-line option (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25). The following example prints the first and second fields of each input record, separated by a semicolon, with a blank line added after each newline:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { OFS = ";"; ORS = "\n\n" }
>         { print $1, $2 }' BBS-list
+ aardvark;555-5553
+
+ alpo-net;555-3412
+
+ barfly;555-7685
...

```

If the value of `ORS` does not contain a newline, the program's output runs together on a single line.

### 5.4 Controlling Numeric Output with print

When printing numeric values with the `print` statement, `awk` internally converts the number to a string of characters and prints that string. `awk` uses the `sprintf()` function to do this conversion (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). For now, it suffices to say that the `sprintf()` function accepts a *format specification* that tells it how to format numbers (or strings), and that there are a number of different ways in which numbers can be formatted. The different format specifications are discussed more fully in [Section 5.5.2 \[Format-Control Letters\]](#), page 76.

The built-in variable `OFMT` contains the default format specification that `print` uses with `sprintf()` when it wants to convert a number to a string for printing. The default value of `OFMT` is `"%.6g"`. The way `print` prints numbers can be changed by supplying different format specifications as the value of `OFMT`, as shown in the following example:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN {
>   OFMT = "%.0f" # print numbers as integers (rounds)
>   print 17.23, 17.54 }'
+ 17 18

```

According to the POSIX standard, `awk`'s behavior is undefined if `OFMT` contains anything but a floating-point conversion specification.



## 5.5 Using `printf` Statements for Fancier Printing

For more precise control over the output format than what is provided by `print`, use `printf`. With `printf` you can specify the width to use for each item, as well as various formatting choices for numbers (such as what output base to use, whether to print an exponent, whether to print a sign, and how many digits to print after the decimal point). You do this by supplying a string, called the *format string*, that controls how and where to print the other arguments.

### 5.5.1 Introduction to the `printf` Statement

A simple `printf` statement looks like this:

```
printf format, item1, item2, ...
```

The entire list of arguments may optionally be enclosed in parentheses. The parentheses are necessary if any of the item expressions use the ‘>’ relational operator; otherwise, it can be confused with an output redirection (see [Section 5.6 \[Redirecting Output of `print` and `printf`\]](#), page 81).

The difference between `printf` and `print` is the *format* argument. This is an expression whose value is taken as a string; it specifies how to output each of the other arguments. It is called the *format string*.

The format string is very similar to that in the ISO C library function `printf()`. Most of *format* is text to output verbatim. Scattered among this text are *format specifiers*—one per item. Each format specifier says to output the next item in the argument list at that place in the format.

The `printf` statement does not automatically append a newline to its output. It outputs only what the format string specifies. So if a newline is needed, you must include one in the format string. The output separator variables `OFS` and `ORS` have no effect on `printf` statements. For example:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN {
>   ORS = "\nOUCH!\n"; OFS = "+"
>   msg = "Dont Panic!"
>   printf "%s\n", msg
> }'
+ Dont Panic!
```

Here, neither the ‘+’ nor the ‘OUCH’ appear in the output message.

### 5.5.2 Format-Control Letters

A format specifier starts with the character ‘%’ and ends with a *format-control letter*—it tells the `printf` statement how to output one item. The format-control letter specifies what *kind* of value to print. The rest of the format specifier is made up of optional *modifiers* that control *how* to print the value, such as the field width. Here is a list of the format-control letters:

- %c** Print a number as an ASCII character; thus, `printf "%c", 65` outputs the letter 'A'. The output for a string value is the first character of the string.
- NOTE:** The POSIX standard says the first character of a string is printed. In locales with multibyte characters, `gawk` attempts to convert the leading bytes of the string into a valid wide character and then to print the multibyte encoding of that character. Similarly, when printing a numeric value, `gawk` allows the value to be within the numeric range of values that can be held in a wide character.
- Other `awk` versions generally restrict themselves to printing the first byte of a string or to numeric values within the range of a single byte (0–255).
- %d, %i** Print a decimal integer. The two control letters are equivalent. (The '`%i`' specification is for compatibility with ISO C.)
- %e, %E** Print a number in scientific (exponential) notation; for example:
- ```
printf "%4.3e\n", 1950
```
- prints '1.950e+03', with a total of four significant figures, three of which follow the decimal point. (The '4.3' represents two modifiers, discussed in the next subsection.) '`%E`' uses 'E' instead of 'e' in the output.
- %f** Print a number in floating-point notation. For example:
- ```
printf "%4.3f", 1950
```
- prints '1950.000', with a total of four significant figures, three of which follow the decimal point. (The '4.3' represents two modifiers, discussed in the next subsection.)
- On systems supporting IEEE 754 floating point format, values representing negative infinity are formatted as '`-inf`' or '`-infinity`', and positive infinity as '`inf`' and '`infinity`'. The special "not a number" value formats as '`-nan`' or '`nan`'.
- %F** Like '`%f`' but the infinity and "not a number" values are spelled using uppercase letters.
- The '`%F`' format is a POSIX extension to ISO C; not all systems support it. On those that don't, `gawk` uses '`%f`' instead.
- %g, %G** Print a number in either scientific notation or in floating-point notation, whichever uses fewer characters; if the result is printed in scientific notation, '`%G`' uses 'E' instead of 'e'.
- %o** Print an unsigned octal integer (see [Section 6.1.1.2 \[Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers\]](#), page 89).
- %s** Print a string.
- %u** Print an unsigned decimal integer. (This format is of marginal use, because all numbers in `awk` are floating-point; it is provided primarily for compatibility with C.)

- `%x, %X` Print an unsigned hexadecimal integer; `%X` uses the letters ‘A’ through ‘F’ instead of ‘a’ through ‘f’ (see [Section 6.1.1.2 \[Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers\]](#), page 89).
- `%%` Print a single ‘%’. This does not consume an argument and it ignores any modifiers.

**NOTE:** When using the integer format-control letters for values that are outside the range of the widest C integer type, `gawk` switches to the `%g` format specifier. If `--lint` is provided on the command line (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), `gawk` warns about this. Other versions of `awk` may print invalid values or do something else entirely.



### 5.5.3 Modifiers for printf Formats

A format specification can also include *modifiers* that can control how much of the item’s value is printed, as well as how much space it gets. The modifiers come between the ‘%’ and the format-control letter. We will use the bullet symbol “•” in the following examples to represent spaces in the output. Here are the possible modifiers, in the order in which they may appear:

- `N$` An integer constant followed by a ‘\$’ is a *positional specifier*. Normally, format specifications are applied to arguments in the order given in the format string. With a positional specifier, the format specification is applied to a specific argument, instead of what would be the next argument in the list. Positional specifiers begin counting with one. Thus:

```
printf "%s %s\n", "don't", "panic"
printf "%2$s %1$s\n", "panic", "don't"
```

prints the famous friendly message twice.

At first glance, this feature doesn’t seem to be of much use. It is in fact a `gawk` extension, intended for use in translating messages at runtime. See [Section 10.4.2 \[Rearranging printf Arguments\]](#), page 189, which describes how and why to use positional specifiers. For now, we will not use them.

- The minus sign, used before the width modifier (see later on in this list), says to left-justify the argument within its specified width. Normally, the argument is printed right-justified in the specified width. Thus:

```
printf "%-4s", "foo"
```

prints ‘foo•’.

- `space` For numeric conversions, prefix positive values with a space and negative values with a minus sign.

- + The plus sign, used before the width modifier (see later on in this list), says to always supply a sign for numeric conversions, even if the data to format is positive. The ‘+’ overrides the space modifier.

- # Use an “alternate form” for certain control letters. For `%o`, supply a leading zero. For `%x` and `%X`, supply a leading ‘0x’ or ‘0X’ for a nonzero result. For `%e`, `%E`, `%f`, and `%F`, the result always contains a decimal point. For `%g` and `%G`, trailing zeros are not removed from the result.

0 A leading ‘0’ (zero) acts as a flag that indicates that output should be padded with zeros instead of spaces. This applies only to the numeric output formats. This flag only has an effect when the field width is wider than the value to print.

’ A single quote or apostrophe character is a POSIX extension to ISO C. It indicates that the integer part of a floating point value, or the entire part of an integer decimal value, should have a thousands-separator character in it. This only works in locales that support such characters. For example:

```
$ cat thousands.awk          Show source program
+ BEGIN { printf "%'d\n", 1234567 }
$ LC_ALL=C gawk -f thousands.awk
+ 1234567                    Results in "C" locale
$ LC_ALL=en_US.UTF-8 gawk -f thousands.awk
+ 1,234,567                  Results in US English UTF locale
```

For more information about locales and internationalization issues, see [Section 6.6 \[Where You Are Makes A Difference\]](#), page 110.

**NOTE:** The ‘’ flag is a nice feature, but its use complicates things: it becomes difficult to use it in command-line programs. For information on appropriate quoting tricks, see [Section 1.1.6 \[Shell-Quoting Issues\]](#), page 15.

*width* This is a number specifying the desired minimum width of a field. Inserting any number between the ‘%’ sign and the format-control character forces the field to expand to this width. The default way to do this is to pad with spaces on the left. For example:

```
printf "%4s", "foo"
prints '•foo'.
```

The value of *width* is a minimum width, not a maximum. If the item value requires more than *width* characters, it can be as wide as necessary. Thus, the following:

```
printf "%4s", "foobar"
prints 'foobar'.
```

Preceding the *width* with a minus sign causes the output to be padded with spaces on the right, instead of on the left.

*.prec* A period followed by an integer constant specifies the precision to use when printing. The meaning of the precision varies by control letter:

```
%d, %i, %o, %u, %x, %X      Minimum number of digits to print.
%e, %E, %f, %F              Number of digits to the right of the decimal point.
%g, %G                      Maximum number of significant digits.
%s                           Maximum number of characters from the string that should print.
```

Thus, the following:

```
    printf "%.4s", "foobar"
prints 'foob'.
```

The C library `printf`'s dynamic *width* and *prec* capability (for example, `%.*s`) is supported. Instead of supplying explicit *width* and/or *prec* values in the format string, they are passed in the argument list. For example:

```
w = 5
p = 3
s = "abcdefg"
printf "%*.s\n", w, p, s
```

is exactly equivalent to:

```
s = "abcdefg"
printf "%5.3s\n", s
```

Both programs output `'••abc'`. Earlier versions of `awk` did not support this capability. If you must use such a version, you may simulate this feature by using concatenation to build up the format string, like so:

```
w = 5
p = 3
s = "abcdefg"
printf "% " w " ." p "s\n", s
```

This is not particularly easy to read but it does work.

C programmers may be used to supplying additional `'l'`, `'L'`, and `'h'` modifiers in `printf` format strings. These are not valid in `awk`. Most `awk` implementations silently ignore them. If `'--lint'` is provided on the command line (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), [page 25](#)), `gawk` warns about their use. If `'--posix'` is supplied, their use is a fatal error.

### 5.5.4 Examples Using `printf`

The following simple example shows how to use `printf` to make an aligned table:

```
awk '{ printf "%-10s %s\n", $1, $2 }' BBS-list
```

This command prints the names of the bulletin boards (`$1`) in the file `'BBS-list'` as a string of 10 characters that are left-justified. It also prints the phone numbers (`$2`) next on the line. This produces an aligned two-column table of names and phone numbers, as shown here:

```
$ awk '{ printf "%-10s %s\n", $1, $2 }' BBS-list
+ aardvark  555-5553
+ alpo-net  555-3412
+ barfly    555-7685
+ bites     555-1675
+ camelot   555-0542
+ core      555-2912
+ fooy      555-1234
+ foot      555-6699
+ macfoo    555-6480
+ sdace     555-3430
+ sabafoo   555-2127
```

In this case, the phone numbers had to be printed as strings because the numbers are separated by a dash. Printing the phone numbers as numbers would have produced just the first three digits: ‘555’. This would have been pretty confusing.

It wasn’t necessary to specify a width for the phone numbers because they are last on their lines. They don’t need to have spaces after them.

The table could be made to look even nicer by adding headings to the tops of the columns. This is done using the `BEGIN` pattern (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114) so that the headers are only printed once, at the beginning of the `awk` program:

```
awk 'BEGIN { print "Name      Number"
           print "----      -" }
     { printf "%-10s %s\n", $1, $2 }' BBS-list
```

The above example mixes `print` and `printf` statements in the same program. Using just `printf` statements can produce the same results:

```
awk 'BEGIN { printf "%-10s %s\n", "Name", "Number"
           printf "%-10s %s\n", "----", "-" }
     { printf "%-10s %s\n", $1, $2 }' BBS-list
```

Printing each column heading with the same format specification used for the column elements ensures that the headings are aligned just like the columns.

The fact that the same format specification is used three times can be emphasized by storing it in a variable, like this:

```
awk 'BEGIN { format = "%-10s %s\n"
           printf format, "Name", "Number"
           printf format, "----", "-" }
     { printf format, $1, $2 }' BBS-list
```

At this point, it would be a worthwhile exercise to use the `printf` statement to line up the headings and table data for the ‘`inventory-shipped`’ example that was covered earlier in the section on the `print` statement (see [Section 5.1 \[The print Statement\]](#), page 73).

## 5.6 Redirecting Output of `print` and `printf`

So far, the output from `print` and `printf` has gone to the standard output, usually the screen. Both `print` and `printf` can also send their output to other places. This is called *redirection*.

**NOTE:** When ‘`--sandbox`’ is specified (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), redirecting output to files and pipes is disabled.

A redirection appears after the `print` or `printf` statement. Redirections in `awk` are written just like redirections in shell commands, except that they are written inside the `awk` program.

There are four forms of output redirection: output to a file, output appended to a file, output through a pipe to another command, and output to a coprocess. They are all shown for the `print` statement, but they work identically for `printf`:

```
print items > output-file
```

This redirection prints the items into the output file named *output-file*. The file name *output-file* can be any expression. Its value is changed to a string and then used as a file name (see [Chapter 6 \[Expressions\]](#), page 89).

When this type of redirection is used, the *output-file* is erased before the first output is written to it. Subsequent writes to the same *output-file* do not erase *output-file*, but append to it. (This is different from how you use redirections in shell scripts.) If *output-file* does not exist, it is created. For example, here is how an *awk* program can write a list of BBS names to one file named ‘name-list’, and a list of phone numbers to another file named ‘phone-list’:

```
$ awk '{ print $2 > "phone-list"
>      print $1 > "name-list" }' BBS-list
$ cat phone-list
+ 555-5553
+ 555-3412
...
$ cat name-list
+ aardvark
+ alpo-net
...
```

Each output file contains one name or number per line.

```
print items >> output-file
```

This redirection prints the items into the pre-existing output file named *output-file*. The difference between this and the single-‘>’ redirection is that the old contents (if any) of *output-file* are not erased. Instead, the *awk* output is appended to the file. If *output-file* does not exist, then it is created.

```
print items | command
```

It is possible to send output to another program through a pipe instead of into a file. This redirection opens a pipe to *command*, and writes the values of *items* through this pipe to another process created to execute *command*.

The redirection argument *command* is actually an *awk* expression. Its value is converted to a string whose contents give the shell command to be run. For example, the following produces two files, one unsorted list of BBS names, and one list sorted in reverse alphabetical order:

```
awk '{ print $1 > "names.unsorted"
      command = "sort -r > names.sorted"
      print $1 | command }' BBS-list
```

The unsorted list is written with an ordinary redirection, while the sorted list is written by piping through the *sort* utility.

The next example uses redirection to mail a message to the mailing list ‘bug-system’. This might be useful when trouble is encountered in an *awk* script run periodically for system maintenance:

```
report = "mail bug-system"
print "Awk script failed:", $0 | report
```

```

m = ("at record number " FNR " of " FILENAME)
print m | report
close(report)

```

The message is built using string concatenation and saved in the variable `m`. It's then sent down the pipeline to the `mail` program. (The parentheses group the items to concatenate—see [Section 6.2.2 \[String Concatenation\]](#), page 96.)

The `close()` function is called here because it's a good idea to close the pipe as soon as all the intended output has been sent to it. See [Section 5.8 \[Closing Input and Output Redirections\]](#), page 86, for more information.

This example also illustrates the use of a variable to represent a *file* or *command*—it is not necessary to always use a string constant. Using a variable is generally a good idea, because (if you mean to refer to that same file or command) `awk` requires that the string value be spelled identically every time.

```
print items |& command
```

This redirection prints the items to the input of *command*. The difference between this and the single-`|` redirection is that the output from *command* can be read with `getline`. Thus *command* is a *coprocess*, which works together with, but subsidiary to, the `awk` program.

This feature is a `gawk` extension, and is not available in POSIX `awk`. See [Section 4.9.7 \[Using `getline` from a Coprocess\]](#), page 71, for a brief discussion. See [Section 11.3 \[Two-Way Communications with Another Process\]](#), page 203, for a more complete discussion.

Redirecting output using `>`, `>>`, `|`, or `|&` asks the system to open a file, pipe, or coprocess only if the particular *file* or *command* you specify has not already been written to by your program or if it has been closed since it was last written to.

It is a common error to use `>` redirection for the first `print` to a file, and then to use `>>` for subsequent output:

```

# clear the file
print "Don't panic" > "guide.txt"
...
# append
print "Avoid improbability generators" >> "guide.txt"

```

This is indeed how redirections must be used from the shell. But in `awk`, it isn't necessary. In this kind of case, a program should use `>` for all the `print` statements, since the output file is only opened once. (It happens that if you mix `>` and `>>` that output is produced in the expected order. However, mixing the operators for the same file is definitely poor style, and is confusing to readers of your program.)

As mentioned earlier (see [Section 4.9.9 \[Points to Remember About `getline`\]](#), page 71), many older `awk` implementations limit the number of pipelines that an `awk` program may have open to just one! In `gawk`, there is no such limit. `gawk` allows a program to open as many pipelines as the underlying operating system permits.

## Advanced Notes: Piping into `sh`

A particularly powerful way to use redirection is to build command lines and pipe them into the shell, `sh`. For example, suppose you have a list of files brought over from a system

where all the file names are stored in uppercase, and you wish to rename them to have names in all lowercase. The following program is both simple and efficient:

```
{ printf("mv %s %s\n", $0, tolower($0)) | "sh" }

END { close("sh") }
```

The `tolower()` function returns its argument string with all uppercase characters converted to lowercase (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). The program builds up a list of command lines, using the `mv` utility to rename the files. It then sends the list to the shell for execution.

## 5.7 Special File Names in `gawk`

`gawk` provides a number of special file names that it interprets internally. These file names provide access to standard file descriptors and TCP/IP networking.

### 5.7.1 Special Files for Standard Descriptors

Running programs conventionally have three input and output streams already available to them for reading and writing. These are known as the *standard input*, *standard output*, and *standard error output*. These streams are, by default, connected to your keyboard and screen, but they are often redirected with the shell, via the `<`, `<<`, `>`, `>>`, `>&`, and `|` operators. Standard error is typically used for writing error messages; the reason there are two separate streams, standard output and standard error, is so that they can be redirected separately.

In other implementations of `awk`, the only way to write an error message to standard error in an `awk` program is as follows:

```
print "Serious error detected!" | "cat 1>&2"
```

This works by opening a pipeline to a shell command that can access the standard error stream that it inherits from the `awk` process. This is far from elegant, and it is also inefficient, because it requires a separate process. So people writing `awk` programs often don't do this. Instead, they send the error messages to the screen, like this:

```
print "Serious error detected!" > "/dev/tty"
```

(`/dev/tty` is a special file supplied by the operating system that is connected to your keyboard and screen. It represents the “terminal,”<sup>1</sup> which on modern systems is a keyboard and screen, not a serial console.) This usually has the same effect but not always: although the standard error stream is usually the screen, it can be redirected; when that happens, writing to the screen is not correct. In fact, if `awk` is run from a background job, it may not have a terminal at all. Then opening `/dev/tty` fails.

`gawk` provides special file names for accessing the three standard streams. (c.e.). It also provides syntax for accessing any other inherited open files. If the file name matches one of these special names when `gawk` redirects input or output, then it directly uses the stream that the file name stands for. These special file names work for all operating systems that `gawk` has been ported to, not just those that are POSIX-compliant:

```
/dev/stdin
```

The standard input (file descriptor 0).

---

<sup>1</sup> The “tty” in `/dev/tty` stands for “Teletype,” a serial terminal.

`‘/dev/stdout’`

The standard output (file descriptor 1).

`‘/dev/stderr’`

The standard error output (file descriptor 2).

`‘/dev/fd/N’`

The file associated with file descriptor *N*. Such a file must be opened by the program initiating the `awk` execution (typically the shell). Unless special pains are taken in the shell from which `gawk` is invoked, only descriptors 0, 1, and 2 are available.

The file names `‘/dev/stdin’`, `‘/dev/stdout’`, and `‘/dev/stderr’` are aliases for `‘/dev/fd/0’`, `‘/dev/fd/1’`, and `‘/dev/fd/2’`, respectively. However, they are more self-explanatory. The proper way to write an error message in a `gawk` program is to use `‘/dev/stderr’`, like this:

```
print "Serious error detected!" > "/dev/stderr"
```

Note the use of quotes around the file name. Like any other redirection, the value must be a string. It is a common error to omit the quotes, which leads to confusing results.

Finally, using the `close()` function on a file name of the form `"/dev/fd/N"`, for file descriptor numbers above two, will actually close the given file descriptor.

The `‘/dev/stdin’`, `‘/dev/stdout’`, and `‘/dev/stderr’` special files are also recognized internally by several other versions of `awk`.

### 5.7.2 Special Files for Network Communications

`gawk` programs can open a two-way TCP/IP connection, acting as either a client or a server. This is done using a special file name of the form:

```
‘/net-type/protocol/local-port/remote-host/remote-port’
```

The *net-type* is one of `‘inet’`, `‘inet4’` or `‘inet6’`. The *protocol* is one of `‘tcp’` or `‘udp’`, and the other fields represent the other essential pieces of information for making a networking connection. These file names are used with the `‘|&’` operator for communicating with a coprocess (see [Section 11.3 \[Two-Way Communications with Another Process\]](#), page 203). This is an advanced feature, mentioned here only for completeness. Full discussion is delayed until [Section 11.4 \[Using gawk for Network Programming\]](#), page 205.

### 5.7.3 Special File Name Caveats

Here is a list of things to bear in mind when using the special file names that `gawk` provides:

- Recognition of these special file names is disabled if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).
- `gawk` *always* interprets these special file names. For example, using `‘/dev/fd/4’` for output actually writes on file descriptor 4, and not on a new file descriptor that is `dup()`’ed from file descriptor 4. Most of the time this does not matter; however, it is important to *not* close any of the files related to file descriptors 0, 1, and 2. Doing so results in unpredictable behavior.

## 5.8 Closing Input and Output Redirections

If the same file name or the same shell command is used with `getline` more than once during the execution of an `awk` program (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with `getline`\]](#), [page 67](#)), the file is opened (or the command is executed) the first time only. At that time, the first record of input is read from that file or command. The next time the same file or command is used with `getline`, another record is read from it, and so on.

Similarly, when a file or pipe is opened for output, `awk` remembers the file name or command associated with it, and subsequent writes to the same file or command are appended to the previous writes. The file or pipe stays open until `awk` exits.

This implies that special steps are necessary in order to read the same file again from the beginning, or to rerun a shell command (rather than reading more output from the same command). The `close()` function makes these things possible:

```
close(filename)
```

or:

```
close(command)
```

The argument *filename* or *command* can be any expression. Its value must *exactly* match the string that was used to open the file or start the command (spaces and other “irrelevant” characters included). For example, if you open a pipe with this:

```
"sort -r names" | getline foo
```

then you must close it with this:

```
close("sort -r names")
```

Once this function call is executed, the next `getline` from that file or command, or the next `print` or `printf` to that file or command, reopens the file or reruns the command. Because the expression that you use to close a file or pipeline must exactly match the expression used to open the file or run the command, it is good practice to use a variable to store the file name or command. The previous example becomes the following:

```
sortcom = "sort -r names"
sortcom | getline foo
...
close(sortcom)
```

This helps avoid hard-to-find typographical errors in your `awk` programs. Here are some of the reasons for closing an output file:

- To write a file and read it back later on in the same `awk` program. Close the file after writing it, then begin reading it with `getline`.
- To write numerous files, successively, in the same `awk` program. If the files aren’t closed, eventually `awk` may exceed a system limit on the number of open files in one process. It is best to close each one when the program has finished writing it.
- To make a command finish. When output is redirected through a pipe, the command reading the pipe normally continues to try to read input as long as the pipe is open. Often this means the command cannot really do its work until the pipe is closed. For example, if output is redirected to the `mail` program, the message is not actually sent until the pipe is closed.

- To run the same program a second time, with the same arguments. This is not the same thing as giving more input to the first run!

For example, suppose a program pipes output to the `mail` program. If it outputs several lines redirected to this pipe without closing it, they make a single message of several lines. By contrast, if the program closes the pipe after each line of output, then each line makes a separate message.

If you use more files than the system allows you to have open, `gawk` attempts to multiplex the available open files among your data files. `gawk`'s ability to do this depends upon the facilities of your operating system, so it may not always work. It is therefore both good practice and good portability advice to always use `close()` on your files when you are done with them. In fact, if you are using a lot of pipes, it is essential that you close commands when done. For example, consider something like this:

```
{
    ...
    command = ("grep " $1 " /some/file | my_prog -q " $3)
    while ((command | getline) > 0) {
        process output of command
    }
    # need close(command) here
}
```

This example creates a new pipeline based on data in *each* record. Without the call to `close()` indicated in the comment, `awk` creates child processes to run the commands, until it eventually runs out of file descriptors for more pipelines.

Even though each command has finished (as indicated by the end-of-file return status from `getline`), the child process is not terminated;<sup>2</sup> more importantly, the file descriptor for the pipe is not closed and released until `close()` is called or `awk` exits.

`close()` will silently do nothing if given an argument that does not represent a file, pipe or coprocess that was opened with a redirection.

Note also that `close(FILENAME)` has no “magic” effects on the implicit loop that reads through the files named on the command line. It is, more likely, a close of a file that was never opened, so `awk` silently does nothing.

When using the `|&` operator to communicate with a coprocess, it is occasionally useful to be able to close one end of the two-way pipe without closing the other. This is done by supplying a second argument to `close()`. As in any other call to `close()`, the first argument is the name of the command or special file used to start the coprocess. The second argument should be a string, with either of the values `"to"` or `"from"`. Case does not matter. As this is an advanced feature, a more complete discussion is delayed until [Section 11.3 \[Two-Way Communications with Another Process\], page 203](#), which discusses it in more detail and gives an example.

### Advanced Notes: Using `close()`'s Return Value

In many versions of Unix `awk`, the `close()` function is actually a statement. It is a syntax error to try and use the return value from `close()`:

<sup>2</sup> The technical terminology is rather morbid. The finished child is called a “zombie,” and cleaning up after it is referred to as “reaping.”



```

command = "...
command | getline info
retval = close(command) # syntax error in many Unix awks

```

`gawk` treats `close()` as a function. The return value is `-1` if the argument names something that was never opened with a redirection, or if there is a system problem closing the file or process. In these cases, `gawk` sets the built-in variable `ERRNO` to a string describing the problem.

In `gawk`, when closing a pipe or coprocess (input or output), the return value is the exit status of the command.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, it is the return value from the system's `close()` or `fclose()` C functions when closing input or output files, respectively. This value is zero if the close succeeds, or `-1` if it fails.

The POSIX standard is very vague; it says that `close()` returns zero on success and nonzero otherwise. In general, different implementations vary in what they report when closing pipes; thus the return value cannot be used portably. In POSIX mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\], page 25](#)), `gawk` just returns zero when closing a pipe.




---

<sup>3</sup> This is a full 16-bit value as returned by the `wait()` system call. See the system manual pages for information on how to decode this value.

## 6 Expressions

Expressions are the basic building blocks of `awk` patterns and actions. An expression evaluates to a value that you can print, test, or pass to a function. Additionally, an expression can assign a new value to a variable or a field by using an assignment operator.

An expression can serve as a pattern or action statement on its own. Most other kinds of statements contain one or more expressions that specify the data on which to operate. As in other languages, expressions in `awk` include variables, array references, constants, and function calls, as well as combinations of these with various operators.

### 6.1 Constants, Variables and Conversions

Expressions are built up from values and the operations performed upon them. This section describes the elementary objects which provide the values used in expressions.

#### 6.1.1 Constant Expressions

The simplest type of expression is the *constant*, which always has the same value. There are three types of constants: numeric, string, and regular expression.

Each is used in the appropriate context when you need a data value that isn't going to change. Numeric constants can have different forms, but are stored identically internally.

##### 6.1.1.1 Numeric and String Constants

A *numeric constant* stands for a number. This number can be an integer, a decimal fraction, or a number in scientific (exponential) notation.<sup>1</sup> Here are some examples of numeric constants that all have the same value:

```
105
1.05e+2
1050e-1
```

A string constant consists of a sequence of characters enclosed in double-quotation marks. For example:

```
"parrot"
```

represents the string whose contents are `'parrot'`. Strings in `gawk` can be of any length, and they can contain any of the possible eight-bit ASCII characters including ASCII NUL (character code zero). Other `awk` implementations may have difficulty with some character codes.

##### 6.1.1.2 Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers

In `awk`, all numbers are in decimal; i.e., base 10. Many other programming languages allow you to specify numbers in other bases, often octal (base 8) and hexadecimal (base 16). In octal, the numbers go 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, etc. Just as `'11'`, in decimal, is 1 times 10 plus 1, so `'11'`, in octal, is 1 times 8, plus 1. This equals 9 in decimal. In hexadecimal, there are 16 digits. Since the everyday decimal number system only has ten digits (`'0'–'9'`), the letters `'a'` through `'f'` are used to represent the rest. (Case in the letters is usually

<sup>1</sup> The internal representation of all numbers, including integers, uses double precision floating-point numbers. On most modern systems, these are in IEEE 754 standard format.

irrelevant; hexadecimal ‘a’ and ‘A’ have the same value.) Thus, ‘11’, in hexadecimal, is 1 times 16 plus 1, which equals 17 in decimal.

Just by looking at plain ‘11’, you can’t tell what base it’s in. So, in C, C++, and other languages derived from C, there is a special notation to signify the base. Octal numbers start with a leading ‘0’, and hexadecimal numbers start with a leading ‘0x’ or ‘0X’:

```
11          Decimal value 11.
011         Octal 11, decimal value 9.
0x11       Hexadecimal 11, decimal value 17.
```

This example shows the difference:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { printf "%d, %d, %d\n", 011, 11, 0x11 }'
+ 9, 11, 17
```

Being able to use octal and hexadecimal constants in your programs is most useful when working with data that cannot be represented conveniently as characters or as regular numbers, such as binary data of various sorts.

**gawk** allows the use of octal and hexadecimal constants in your program text. However, such numbers in the input data are not treated differently; doing so by default would break old programs. (If you really need to do this, use the ‘`--non-decimal-data`’ command-line option; see [Section 11.1 \[Allowing Nondecimal Input Data\]](#), page 195.) If you have octal or hexadecimal data, you can use the `strtonum()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149) to convert the data into a number. Most of the time, you will want to use octal or hexadecimal constants when working with the built-in bit manipulation functions; see [Section 9.1.6 \[Bit-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 167, for more information.

Unlike some early C implementations, ‘8’ and ‘9’ are not valid in octal constants; e.g., **gawk** treats ‘018’ as decimal 18:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { print "021 is", 021 ; print 018 }'
+ 021 is 17
+ 18
```

Octal and hexadecimal source code constants are a **gawk** extension. If **gawk** is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), they are not available.

### Advanced Notes: A Constant’s Base Does Not Affect Its Value

Once a numeric constant has been converted internally into a number, **gawk** no longer remembers what the original form of the constant was; the internal value is always used. This has particular consequences for conversion of numbers to strings:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { printf "0x11 is <%s>\n", 0x11 }'
+ 0x11 is <17>
```

#### 6.1.1.3 Regular Expression Constants

A regexp constant is a regular expression description enclosed in slashes, such as `/^beginning and end$/`. Most regexps used in **awk** programs are constant, but the ‘`~`’ and ‘`!~`’ matching operators can also match computed or dynamic regexps (which are just ordinary strings or variables that contain a regexp).

### 6.1.2 Using Regular Expression Constants

When used on the righthand side of the ‘~’ or ‘!~’ operators, a regexp constant merely stands for the regexp that is to be matched. However, regexp constants (such as `/foo/`) may be used like simple expressions. When a regexp constant appears by itself, it has the same meaning as if it appeared in a pattern, i.e., ‘`($0 ~ /foo/)`’ See [Section 7.1.2 \[Expressions as Patterns\], page 111](#). This means that the following two code segments:

```
if ($0 ~ /barfly/ || $0 ~ /camelot/)
    print "found"
```

and:

```
if (/barfly/ || /camelot/)
    print "found"
```

are exactly equivalent. One rather bizarre consequence of this rule is that the following Boolean expression is valid, but does not do what the user probably intended:

```
# Note that /foo/ is on the left of the ~
if (/foo/ ~ $1) print "found foo"
```

This code is “obviously” testing `$1` for a match against the regexp `/foo/`. But in fact, the expression ‘`/foo/ ~ $1`’ really means ‘`($0 ~ /foo/) ~ $1`’. In other words, first match the input record against the regexp `/foo/`. The result is either zero or one, depending upon the success or failure of the match. That result is then matched against the first field in the record. Because it is unlikely that you would ever really want to make this kind of test, `gawk` issues a warning when it sees this construct in a program. Another consequence of this rule is that the assignment statement:

```
matches = /foo/
```

assigns either zero or one to the variable `matches`, depending upon the contents of the current input record.

Constant regular expressions are also used as the first argument for the `gensub()`, `sub()`, and `gsub()` functions, as the second argument of the `match()` function, and as the third argument of the `patsplit()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\], page 149](#)). Modern implementations of `awk`, including `gawk`, allow the third argument of `split()` to be a regexp constant, but some older implementations do not. This can lead to confusion when attempting to use regexp constants as arguments to user-defined functions (see [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\], page 170](#)). For example:

```
function mysub(pat, repl, str, global)
{
    if (global)
        gsub(pat, repl, str)
    else
        sub(pat, repl, str)
    return str
}

{
    ...
    text = "hi! hi yourself!"
```



```

    mysub(/hi/, "howdy", text, 1)
    ...
}

```

In this example, the programmer wants to pass a regexp constant to the user-defined function `mysub`, which in turn passes it on to either `sub()` or `gsub()`. However, what really happens is that the `pat` parameter is either one or zero, depending upon whether or not `$0` matches `/hi/`. `gawk` issues a warning when it sees a regexp constant used as a parameter to a user-defined function, since passing a truth value in this way is probably not what was intended.

### 6.1.3 Variables

Variables are ways of storing values at one point in your program for use later in another part of your program. They can be manipulated entirely within the program text, and they can also be assigned values on the `awk` command line.

#### 6.1.3.1 Using Variables in a Program

Variables let you give names to values and refer to them later. Variables have already been used in many of the examples. The name of a variable must be a sequence of letters, digits, or underscores, and it may not begin with a digit. Case is significant in variable names; `a` and `A` are distinct variables.

A variable name is a valid expression by itself; it represents the variable's current value. Variables are given new values with *assignment operators*, *increment operators*, and *decrement operators*. See [Section 6.2.3 \[Assignment Expressions\]](#), page 98. In addition, the `sub()` and `gsub()` functions can change a variable's value, and the `match()`, `patsplit()` and `split()` functions can change the contents of their array parameters. See [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149.

A few variables have special built-in meanings, such as `FS` (the field separator), and `NF` (the number of fields in the current input record). See [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126, for a list of the built-in variables. These built-in variables can be used and assigned just like all other variables, but their values are also used or changed automatically by `awk`. All built-in variables' names are entirely uppercase.

Variables in `awk` can be assigned either numeric or string values. The kind of value a variable holds can change over the life of a program. By default, variables are initialized to the empty string, which is zero if converted to a number. There is no need to explicitly "initialize" a variable in `awk`, which is what you would do in C and in most other traditional languages.

#### 6.1.3.2 Assigning Variables on the Command Line

Any `awk` variable can be set by including a *variable assignment* among the arguments on the command line when `awk` is invoked (see [Section 2.3 \[Other Command-Line Arguments\]](#), page 30). Such an assignment has the following form:

```
variable=text
```

With it, a variable is set either at the beginning of the `awk` run or in between input files. When the assignment is preceded with the `-v` option, as in the following:

```
-v variable=text
```

the variable is set at the very beginning, even before the BEGIN rules execute. The `-v` option and its assignment must precede all the file name arguments, as well as the program text. (See Section 2.2 [Command-Line Options], page 25, for more information about the `-v` option.) Otherwise, the variable assignment is performed at a time determined by its position among the input file arguments—after the processing of the preceding input file argument. For example:

```
awk '{ print $n }' n=4 inventory-shipped n=2 BBS-list
```

prints the value of field number `n` for all input records. Before the first file is read, the command line sets the variable `n` equal to four. This causes the fourth field to be printed in lines from `inventory-shipped`. After the first file has finished, but before the second file is started, `n` is set to two, so that the second field is printed in lines from `BBS-list`:

```
$ awk '{ print $n }' n=4 inventory-shipped n=2 BBS-list
+ 15
+ 24
...
+ 555-5553
+ 555-3412
...
```

Command-line arguments are made available for explicit examination by the `awk` program in the `ARGV` array (see Section 7.5.3 [Using `ARGC` and `ARGV`], page 133). `awk` processes the values of command-line assignments for escape sequences (see Section 3.2 [Escape Sequences], page 38).



### 6.1.4 Conversion of Strings and Numbers

Strings are converted to numbers and numbers are converted to strings, if the context of the `awk` program demands it. For example, if the value of either `foo` or `bar` in the expression `foo + bar` happens to be a string, it is converted to a number before the addition is performed. If numeric values appear in string concatenation, they are converted to strings. Consider the following:

```
two = 2; three = 3
print (two three) + 4
```

This prints the (numeric) value 27. The numeric values of the variables `two` and `three` are converted to strings and concatenated together. The resulting string is converted back to the number 23, to which 4 is then added.

If, for some reason, you need to force a number to be converted to a string, concatenate that number with the empty string, `"`. To force a string to be converted to a number, add zero to that string. A string is converted to a number by interpreting any numeric prefix of the string as numerals: `"2.5"` converts to 2.5, `"1e3"` converts to 1000, and `"25fix"` has a numeric value of 25. Strings that can't be interpreted as valid numbers convert to zero.

The exact manner in which numbers are converted into strings is controlled by the `awk` built-in variable `CONVFMT` (see Section 7.5 [Built-in Variables], page 126). Numbers are converted using the `sprintf()` function with `CONVFMT` as the format specifier (see Section 9.1.3 [String-Manipulation Functions], page 149).

`CONVFMT`'s default value is `%.6g`, which prints a value with at most six significant digits. For some applications, you might want to change it to specify more precision. On most

modern machines, 17 digits is usually enough to capture a floating-point number's value exactly.<sup>2</sup>

Strange results can occur if you set `CONVFMT` to a string that doesn't tell `printf()` how to format floating-point numbers in a useful way. For example, if you forget the `'%'` in the format, `awk` converts all numbers to the same constant string.

As a special case, if a number is an integer, then the result of converting it to a string is *always* an integer, no matter what the value of `CONVFMT` may be. Given the following code fragment:

```
CONVFMT = "%2.2f"
a = 12
b = a ""
```

 `b` has the value `"12"`, not `"12.00"`.

Prior to the POSIX standard, `awk` used the value of `OFMT` for converting numbers to strings. `OFMT` specifies the output format to use when printing numbers with `print`. `CONVFMT` was introduced in order to separate the semantics of conversion from the semantics of printing. Both `CONVFMT` and `OFMT` have the same default value: `%.6g`. In the vast majority of cases, old `awk` programs do not change their behavior. However, these semantics for `OFMT` are something to keep in mind if you must port your new-style program to older implementations of `awk`. We recommend that instead of changing your programs, just port `gawk` itself. See [Section 5.1 \[The `print` Statement\]](#), page 73, for more information on the `print` statement.

And, once again, where you are can matter when it comes to converting between numbers and strings. In [Section 6.6 \[Where You Are Makes A Difference\]](#), page 110, we mentioned that the local character set and language (the locale) can affect how `gawk` matches characters. The locale also affects numeric formats. In particular, for `awk` programs, it affects the decimal point character. The `"C"` locale, and most English-language locales, use the period character (`'.'`) as the decimal point. However, many (if not most) European and non-English locales use the comma (`','`) as the decimal point character.

The POSIX standard says that `awk` always uses the period as the decimal point when reading the `awk` program source code, and for command-line variable assignments (see [Section 2.3 \[Other Command-Line Arguments\]](#), page 30). However, when interpreting input data, for `print` and `printf` output, and for number to string conversion, the local decimal point character is used. Here are some examples indicating the difference in behavior, on a GNU/Linux system:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { printf "%g\n", 3.1415927 }'
+ 3.14159
$ LC_ALL=en_DK gawk 'BEGIN { printf "%g\n", 3.1415927 }'
+ 3,14159
$ echo 4,321 | gawk '{ print $1 + 1 }'
+ 5
$ echo 4,321 | LC_ALL=en_DK gawk '{ print $1 + 1 }'
+ 5,321
```

---

<sup>2</sup> Pathological cases can require up to 752 digits (!), but we doubt that you need to worry about this.

The ‘en\_DK’ locale is for English in Denmark, where the comma acts as the decimal point separator. In the normal “C” locale, `gawk` treats ‘4,321’ as ‘4’, while in the Danish locale, it’s treated as the full number, 4.321.

Some earlier versions of `gawk` fully complied with this aspect of the standard. However, many users in non-English locales complained about this behavior, since their data used a period as the decimal point, so the default behavior was restored to use a period as the decimal point character. You can use the ‘--use-lc-numeric’ option (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25) to force `gawk` to use the locale’s decimal point character. (`gawk` also uses the locale’s decimal point character when in POSIX mode, either via ‘--posix’, or the `POSIXLY_CORRECT` environment variable.)

[Table 6.1](#) describes the cases in which the locale’s decimal point character is used and when a period is used. Some of these features have not been described yet.

Feature	Default	‘--posix’ or ‘--use-lc-numeric’
%’g	Use locale	Use locale
%g	Use period	Use locale
Input	Use period	Use locale
<code>strtonum()</code>	Use period	Use locale

Table 6.1: Locale Decimal Point versus A Period

Finally, modern day formal standards and IEEE standard floating point representation can have an unusual but important effect on the way `gawk` converts some special string values to numbers. The details are presented in [Section D.3.3 \[Standards Versus Existing Practice\]](#), page 345.

## 6.2 Operators: Doing Something With Values

This section introduces the *operators* which make use of the values provided by constants and variables.

### 6.2.1 Arithmetic Operators

The `awk` language uses the common arithmetic operators when evaluating expressions. All of these arithmetic operators follow normal precedence rules and work as you would expect them to.

The following example uses a file named ‘grades’, which contains a list of student names as well as three test scores per student (it’s a small class):

```
Pat    100 97 58
Sandy  84 72 93
Chris  72 92 89
```

This program takes the file ‘grades’ and prints the average of the scores:

```
$ awk '{ sum = $2 + $3 + $4 ; avg = sum / 3
>      print $1, avg }' grades
+ Pat 85
+ Sandy 83
+ Chris 84.3333
```

The following list provides the arithmetic operators in `awk`, in order from the highest precedence to the lowest:

<code>- x</code>	Negation.
<code>+ x</code>	Unary plus; the expression is converted to a number.
<code>x ^ y</code>	
<code>x ** y</code>	Exponentiation; <code>x</code> raised to the <code>y</code> power. ‘ <code>2 ^ 3</code> ’ has the value eight; the character sequence ‘ <code>**</code> ’ is equivalent to ‘ <code>^</code> ’. (c.e.)
<code>x * y</code>	Multiplication.
<code>x / y</code>	Division; because all numbers in <code>awk</code> are floating-point numbers, the result is <i>not</i> rounded to an integer—‘ <code>3 / 4</code> ’ has the value 0.75. (It is a common mistake, especially for C programmers, to forget that <i>all</i> numbers in <code>awk</code> are floating-point, and that division of integer-looking constants produces a real number, not an integer.)
<code>x % y</code>	Remainder; further discussion is provided in the text, just after this list.
<code>x + y</code>	Addition.
<code>x - y</code>	Subtraction.

Unary plus and minus have the same precedence, the multiplication operators all have the same precedence, and addition and subtraction have the same precedence.

When computing the remainder of ‘`x % y`’, the quotient is rounded toward zero to an integer and multiplied by `y`. This result is subtracted from `x`; this operation is sometimes known as “trunc-mod.” The following relation always holds:

$$b * \text{int}(a / b) + (a \% b) == a$$

One possibly undesirable effect of this definition of remainder is that `x % y` is negative if `x` is negative. Thus:

$$-17 \% 8 = -1$$

In other `awk` implementations, the signedness of the remainder may be machine-dependent.

**NOTE:** The POSIX standard only specifies the use of ‘`^`’ for exponentiation. For maximum portability, do not use the ‘`**`’ operator.

## 6.2.2 String Concatenation

*It seemed like a good idea at the time.*

Brian Kernighan

There is only one string operation: concatenation. It does not have a specific operator to represent it. Instead, concatenation is performed by writing expressions next to one another, with no operator. For example:

```
$ awk '{ print "Field number one: " $1 }' BBS-list
-| Field number one: aardvark
-| Field number one: alpo-net
...
```

Without the space in the string constant after the ‘`:`’, the line runs together. For example:

```
$ awk '{ print "Field number one:" $1 }' BBS-list
+ Field number one:aardvark
+ Field number one:alpo-net
...
```

Because string concatenation does not have an explicit operator, it is often necessary to insure that it happens at the right time by using parentheses to enclose the items to concatenate. For example, you might expect that the following code fragment concatenates `file` and `name`:

```
file = "file"
name = "name"
print "something meaningful" > file name
```

This produces a syntax error with some versions of Unix `awk`.<sup>3</sup> It is necessary to use the following:

```
print "something meaningful" > (file name)
```

Parentheses should be used around concatenation in all but the most common contexts, such as on the righthand side of `=`. Be careful about the kinds of expressions used in string concatenation. In particular, the order of evaluation of expressions used for concatenation is undefined in the `awk` language. Consider this example:

```
BEGIN {
    a = "don't"
    print (a " " (a = "panic"))
}
```

It is not defined whether the assignment to `a` happens before or after the value of `a` is retrieved for producing the concatenated value. The result could be either `'don't panic'`, or `'panic panic'`.

The precedence of concatenation, when mixed with other operators, is often counter-intuitive. Consider this example:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { print -12 " " -24 }'
+ -12-24
```

This “obviously” is concatenating `-12`, a space, and `-24`. But where did the space disappear to? The answer lies in the combination of operator precedences and `awk`'s automatic conversion rules. To get the desired result, write the program this way:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { print -12 " " (-24) }'
+ -12 -24
```

This forces `awk` to treat the `'-'` on the `'-24'` as unary. Otherwise, it's parsed as follows:

```
-12 (" " - 24)
⇒ -12 (0 - 24)
⇒ -12 (-24)
⇒ -12-24
```

As mentioned earlier, when doing concatenation, *parenthesize*. Otherwise, you're never quite sure what you'll get.

---

<sup>3</sup> It happens that Brian Kernighan's `awk`, `gawk` and `mawk` all “get it right,” but you should not rely on this.

### 6.2.3 Assignment Expressions

An *assignment* is an expression that stores a (usually different) value into a variable. For example, let's assign the value one to the variable `z`:

```
z = 1
```

After this expression is executed, the variable `z` has the value one. Whatever old value `z` had before the assignment is forgotten.

Assignments can also store string values. For example, the following stores the value "this food is good" in the variable `message`:

```
thing = "food"
predicate = "good"
message = "this " thing " is " predicate
```

This also illustrates string concatenation. The '=' sign is called an *assignment operator*. It is the simplest assignment operator because the value of the righthand operand is stored unchanged. Most operators (addition, concatenation, and so on) have no effect except to compute a value. If the value isn't used, there's no reason to use the operator. An assignment operator is different; it does produce a value, but even if you ignore it, the assignment still makes itself felt through the alteration of the variable. We call this a *side effect*.

The lefthand operand of an assignment need not be a variable (see [Section 6.1.3 \[Variables\], page 92](#)); it can also be a field (see [Section 4.4 \[Changing the Contents of a Field\], page 54](#)) or an array element (see [Chapter 8 \[Arrays in awk\], page 135](#)). These are all called *lvalues*, which means they can appear on the lefthand side of an assignment operator. The righthand operand may be any expression; it produces the new value that the assignment stores in the specified variable, field, or array element. (Such values are called *rvalues*.)

It is important to note that variables do *not* have permanent types. A variable's type is simply the type of whatever value it happens to hold at the moment. In the following program fragment, the variable `foo` has a numeric value at first, and a string value later on:

```
foo = 1
print foo
foo = "bar"
print foo
```

When the second assignment gives `foo` a string value, the fact that it previously had a numeric value is forgotten.

String values that do not begin with a digit have a numeric value of zero. After executing the following code, the value of `foo` is five:

```
foo = "a string"
foo = foo + 5
```

**NOTE:** Using a variable as a number and then later as a string can be confusing and is poor programming style. The previous two examples illustrate how `awk` works, *not* how you should write your programs!

An assignment is an expression, so it has a value—the same value that is assigned. Thus, '`z = 1`' is an expression with the value one. One consequence of this is that you can write multiple assignments together, such as:

```
x = y = z = 5
```

This example stores the value five in all three variables (*x*, *y*, and *z*). It does so because the value of '*z* = 5', which is five, is stored into *y* and then the value of '*y* = *z* = 5', which is five, is stored into *x*.

Assignments may be used anywhere an expression is called for. For example, it is valid to write '*x* != (*y* = 1)' to set *y* to one, and then test whether *x* equals one. But this style tends to make programs hard to read; such nesting of assignments should be avoided, except perhaps in a one-shot program.

Aside from '=', there are several other assignment operators that do arithmetic with the old value of the variable. For example, the operator '+=' computes a new value by adding the righthand value to the old value of the variable. Thus, the following assignment adds five to the value of *foo*:

```
foo += 5
```

This is equivalent to the following:

```
foo = foo + 5
```

Use whichever makes the meaning of your program clearer.

There are situations where using '+' (or any assignment operator) is *not* the same as simply repeating the lefthand operand in the righthand expression. For example:

```
# Thanks to Pat Rankin for this example
BEGIN {
    foo[rand()] += 5
    for (x in foo)
        print x, foo[x]

    bar[rand()] = bar[rand()] + 5
    for (x in bar)
        print x, bar[x]
}
```

The indices of *bar* are practically guaranteed to be different, because *rand()* returns different values each time it is called. (Arrays and the *rand()* function haven't been covered yet. See [Chapter 8 \[Arrays in awk\]](#), page 135, and see [Section 9.1.2 \[Numeric Functions\]](#), page 147, for more information). This example illustrates an important fact about assignment operators: the lefthand expression is only evaluated *once*. It is up to the implementation as to which expression is evaluated first, the lefthand or the righthand. Consider this example:

```
i = 1
a[i += 2] = i + 1
```

The value of *a*[3] could be either two or four.

[Table 6.2](#) lists the arithmetic assignment operators. In each case, the righthand operand is an expression whose value is converted to a number.

<b>Operator</b>	<b>Effect</b>
<i>lvalue</i> += <i>increment</i>	Adds <i>increment</i> to the value of <i>lvalue</i> .
<i>lvalue</i> -= <i>decrement</i>	Subtracts <i>decrement</i> from the value of <i>lvalue</i> .
<i>lvalue</i> *= <i>coefficient</i>	Multiplies the value of <i>lvalue</i> by <i>coefficient</i> .
<i>lvalue</i> /= <i>divisor</i>	Divides the value of <i>lvalue</i> by <i>divisor</i> .
<i>lvalue</i> %= <i>modulus</i>	Sets <i>lvalue</i> to its remainder by <i>modulus</i> .
<i>lvalue</i> ^= <i>power</i>	
<i>lvalue</i> **= <i>power</i>	Raises <i>lvalue</i> to the power <i>power</i> . (c.e.)

Table 6.2: Arithmetic Assignment Operators

**NOTE:** Only the ‘^=’ operator is specified by POSIX. For maximum portability, do not use the ‘\*\*=’ operator.

## Advanced Notes: Syntactic Ambiguities Between ‘/=’ and Regular Expressions



There is a syntactic ambiguity between the /= assignment operator and regexp constants whose first character is an ‘=’. This is most notable in commercial `awk` versions. For example:

```
$ awk /==/ /dev/null
error awk: syntax error at source line 1
error context is
error >>> /= <<<
error awk: bailing out at source line 1
```

A workaround is:

```
awk '/[=]=/' /dev/null
```

`gawk` does not have this problem, nor do the other freely available versions described in [Section B.5 \[Other Freely Available `awk` Implementations\]](#), page 321.

### 6.2.4 Increment and Decrement Operators

*Increment* and *decrement operators* increase or decrease the value of a variable by one. An assignment operator can do the same thing, so the increment operators add no power to the `awk` language; however, they are convenient abbreviations for very common operations.

The operator used for adding one is written ‘++’. It can be used to increment a variable either before or after taking its value. To pre-increment a variable `v`, write ‘++v’. This adds one to the value of `v`—that new value is also the value of the expression. (The assignment expression ‘`v += 1`’ is completely equivalent.) Writing the ‘++’ after the variable specifies post-increment. This increments the variable value just the same; the difference is that the value of the increment expression itself is the variable’s *old* value. Thus, if `foo` has the value four, then the expression ‘`foo++`’ has the value four, but it changes the value of `foo` to five. In other words, the operator returns the old value of the variable, but with the side effect of incrementing it.

The post-increment ‘`foo++`’ is nearly the same as writing ‘`(foo += 1) - 1`’. It is not perfectly equivalent because all numbers in `awk` are floating-point—in floating-point, ‘`foo`

`+ 1 - 1` does not necessarily equal `foo`. But the difference is minute as long as you stick to numbers that are fairly small (less than  $10e12$ ).

Fields and array elements are incremented just like variables. (Use `$(i++)` when you want to do a field reference and a variable increment at the same time. The parentheses are necessary because of the precedence of the field reference operator `$`.)

The decrement operator `--` works just like `++`, except that it subtracts one instead of adding it. As with `++`, it can be used before the `lvalue` to pre-decrement or after it to post-decrement. Following is a summary of increment and decrement expressions:

- `++lvalue` Increment *lvalue*, returning the new value as the value of the expression.
- `lvalue++` Increment *lvalue*, returning the *old* value of *lvalue* as the value of the expression.
- `--lvalue` Decrement *lvalue*, returning the new value as the value of the expression. (This expression is like `++lvalue`, but instead of adding, it subtracts.)
- `lvalue--` Decrement *lvalue*, returning the *old* value of *lvalue* as the value of the expression. (This expression is like `lvalue++`, but instead of adding, it subtracts.)

## Advanced Notes: Operator Evaluation Order

*Doctor, doctor! It hurts when I do this!  
So don't do that!  
Groucho Marx*

What happens for something like the following?

```
b = 6
print b += b++
```

Or something even stranger?

```
b = 6
b += ++b + b++
print b
```

In other words, when do the various side effects prescribed by the postfix operators (`b++`) take effect? When side effects happen is *implementation defined*. In other words, it is up to the particular version of `awk`. The result for the first example may be 12 or 13, and for the second, it may be 22 or 23.

In short, doing things like this is not recommended and definitely not anything that you can rely upon for portability. You should avoid such things in your own programs.

## 6.3 Truth Values and Conditions

In certain contexts, expression values also serve as “truth values;” i.e., they determine what should happen next as the program runs. This section describes how `awk` defines “true” and “false” and how values are compared.

### 6.3.1 True and False in `awk`

Many programming languages have a special representation for the concepts of “true” and “false.” Such languages usually use the special constants `true` and `false`, or perhaps their uppercase equivalents. However, `awk` is different. It borrows a very simple concept of true

and false from C. In `awk`, any nonzero numeric value *or* any nonempty string value is true. Any other value (zero or the null string, `"`) is false. The following program prints ‘A strange truth value’ three times:

```
BEGIN {
  if (3.1415927)
    print "A strange truth value"
  if ("Four Score And Seven Years Ago")
    print "A strange truth value"
  if (j = 57)
    print "A strange truth value"
}
```



There is a surprising consequence of the “nonzero or non-null” rule: the string constant `"0"` is actually true, because it is non-null.

### 6.3.2 Variable Typing and Comparison Expressions

*The Guide is definitive. Reality is frequently inaccurate.*

The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy

Unlike other programming languages, `awk` variables do not have a fixed type. Instead, they can be either a number or a string, depending upon the value that is assigned to them. We look now at how variables are typed, and how `awk` compares variables.

#### 6.3.2.1 String Type Versus Numeric Type

The 1992 POSIX standard introduced the concept of a *numeric string*, which is simply a string that looks like a number—for example, `" +2"`. This concept is used for determining the type of a variable. The type of the variable is important because the types of two variables determine how they are compared. The various versions of the POSIX standard did not get the rules quite right for several editions. Fortunately, as of at least the 2008 standard (and possibly earlier), the standard has been fixed, and variable typing follows these rules:<sup>4</sup>

- A numeric constant or the result of a numeric operation has the *numeric* attribute.
- A string constant or the result of a string operation has the *string* attribute.
- Fields, `getline` input, `FILENAME`, `ARGV` elements, `ENVIRON` elements, and the elements of an array created by `pat_split()`, `split()` and `match()` that are numeric strings have the *strnum* attribute. Otherwise, they have the *string* attribute. Uninitialized variables also have the *strnum* attribute.
- Attributes propagate across assignments but are not changed by any use.

The last rule is particularly important. In the following program, `a` has numeric type, even though it is later used in a string operation:

```
BEGIN {
  a = 12.345
  b = a " is a cute number"
  print b
}
```

<sup>4</sup> `gawk` has followed these rules for many years, and it is gratifying that the POSIX standard is also now correct.

```
}
```

When two operands are compared, either string comparison or numeric comparison may be used. This depends upon the attributes of the operands, according to the following symmetric matrix:

	STRING	NUMERIC	STRNUM
STRING	string	string	string
NUMERIC	string	numeric	numeric
STRNUM	string	numeric	numeric

The basic idea is that user input that looks numeric—and *only* user input—should be treated as numeric, even though it is actually made of characters and is therefore also a string. Thus, for example, the string constant "+3.14", when it appears in program source code, is a string—even though it looks numeric—and is *never* treated as number for comparison purposes.

In short, when one operand is a “pure” string, such as a string constant, then a string comparison is performed. Otherwise, a numeric comparison is performed.

This point bears additional emphasis: All user input is made of characters, and so is first and foremost of *string* type; input strings that look numeric are additionally given the *strnum* attribute. Thus, the six-character input string '+3.14' receives the *strnum* attribute. In contrast, the eight-character literal "+3.14" appearing in program text is a string constant. The following examples print '1' when the comparison between the two different constants is true, '0' otherwise:

```
$ echo '+3.14' | gawk '{ print $0 == "+3.14" }'      True
+ 1
$ echo '+3.14' | gawk '{ print $0 == "+3.14" }'      False
+ 0
$ echo '+3.14' | gawk '{ print $0 == "3.14" }'       False
+ 0
$ echo '+3.14' | gawk '{ print $0 == 3.14 }'         True
+ 1
$ echo '+3.14' | gawk '{ print $1 == "+3.14" }'      False
+ 0
$ echo '+3.14' | gawk '{ print $1 == "+3.14" }'      True
+ 1
$ echo '+3.14' | gawk '{ print $1 == "3.14" }'       False
+ 0
$ echo '+3.14' | gawk '{ print $1 == 3.14 }'         True
+ 1
```

### 6.3.2.2 Comparison Operators

*Comparison expressions* compare strings or numbers for relationships such as equality. They are written using *relational operators*, which are a superset of those in C. [Table 6.3](#) describes them.

<b>Expression</b>	<b>Result</b>
<code>x &lt; y</code>	True if <i>x</i> is less than <i>y</i> .
<code>x &lt;= y</code>	True if <i>x</i> is less than or equal to <i>y</i> .
<code>x &gt; y</code>	True if <i>x</i> is greater than <i>y</i> .
<code>x &gt;= y</code>	True if <i>x</i> is greater than or equal to <i>y</i> .
<code>x == y</code>	True if <i>x</i> is equal to <i>y</i> .
<code>x != y</code>	True if <i>x</i> is not equal to <i>y</i> .
<code>x ~ y</code>	True if the string <i>x</i> matches the regexp denoted by <i>y</i> .
<code>x !~ y</code>	True if the string <i>x</i> does not match the regexp denoted by <i>y</i> .
<code>subscript in array</code>	True if the array <i>array</i> has an element with the subscript <i>subscript</i> .

Table 6.3: Relational Operators

Comparison expressions have the value one if true and zero if false. When comparing operands of mixed types, numeric operands are converted to strings using the value of `CONVFMT` (see [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\]](#), page 93).

Strings are compared by comparing the first character of each, then the second character of each, and so on. Thus, "10" is less than "9". If there are two strings where one is a prefix of the other, the shorter string is less than the longer one. Thus, "abc" is less than "abcd".

It is very easy to accidentally mistype the `'=='` operator and leave off one of the `'='` characters. The result is still valid `awk` code, but the program does not do what is intended:

```
if (a = b)    # oops! should be a == b
    ...
else
    ...
```

Unless `b` happens to be zero or the null string, the `if` part of the test always succeeds. Because the operators are so similar, this kind of error is very difficult to spot when scanning the source code.

The following table of expressions illustrates the kind of comparison `gawk` performs, as well as what the result of the comparison is:

```
1.5 <= 2.0
    numeric comparison (true)

"abc" >= "xyz"
    string comparison (false)

1.5 != " +2"
    string comparison (true)

"1e2" < "3"
    string comparison (true)

a = 2; b = "2"
a == b    string comparison (true)

a = 2; b = " +2"
a == b    string comparison (false)
```

In this example:

```
$ echo 1e2 3 | awk '{ print ($1 < $2) ? "true" : "false" }'
+ false
```

the result is ‘false’ because both \$1 and \$2 are user input. They are numeric strings—therefore both have the *strnum* attribute, dictating a numeric comparison. The purpose of the comparison rules and the use of numeric strings is to attempt to produce the behavior that is “least surprising,” while still “doing the right thing.”

String comparisons and regular expression comparisons are very different. For example:

```
x == "foo"
```

has the value one, or is true if the variable *x* is precisely ‘foo’. By contrast:

```
x ~ /foo/
```

has the value one if *x* contains ‘foo’, such as “Oh, what a fool am I!”.

The righthand operand of the ‘~’ and ‘!~’ operators may be either a regexp constant (*/.../*) or an ordinary expression. In the latter case, the value of the expression as a string is used as a dynamic regexp (see [Section 3.1 \[How to Use Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37; also see [Section 3.8 \[Using Dynamic Regexp\]](#), page 47).

In modern implementations of *awk*, a constant regular expression in slashes by itself is also an expression. The regexp */regexp/* is an abbreviation for the following comparison expression:

```
$0 ~ /regexp/
```

One special place where */foo/* is *not* an abbreviation for ‘\$0 ~ /foo/’ is when it is the righthand operand of ‘~’ or ‘!~’. See [Section 6.1.2 \[Using Regular Expression Constants\]](#), page 91, where this is discussed in more detail.

### 6.3.2.3 String Comparison With POSIX Rules

The POSIX standard says that string comparison is performed based on the locale’s collating order. This is usually very different from the results obtained when doing straight character-by-character comparison.<sup>5</sup>

Because this behavior differs considerably from existing practice, *gawk* only implements it when in POSIX mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25). Here is an example to illustrate the difference, in an ‘en\_US.UTF-8’ locale:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { printf("ABC < abc = %s\n",
> ("ABC" < "abc" ? "TRUE" : "FALSE")) }'
+ ABC < abc = TRUE
$ gawk --posix 'BEGIN { printf("ABC < abc = %s\n",
> ("ABC" < "abc" ? "TRUE" : "FALSE")) }'
+ ABC < abc = FALSE
```

### 6.3.3 Boolean Expressions

A *Boolean expression* is a combination of comparison expressions or matching expressions, using the Boolean operators “or” (‘||’), “and” (‘&&’), and “not” (‘!’), along with parentheses

<sup>5</sup> Technically, string comparison is supposed to behave the same way as if the strings are compared with the C `strcoll()` function.

to control nesting. The truth value of the Boolean expression is computed by combining the truth values of the component expressions. Boolean expressions are also referred to as *logical expressions*. The terms are equivalent.

Boolean expressions can be used wherever comparison and matching expressions can be used. They can be used in `if`, `while`, `do`, and `for` statements (see [Section 7.4 \[Control Statements in Actions\]](#), page 118). They have numeric values (one if true, zero if false) that come into play if the result of the Boolean expression is stored in a variable or used in arithmetic.

In addition, every Boolean expression is also a valid pattern, so you can use one as a pattern to control the execution of rules. The Boolean operators are:

**`boolean1 && boolean2`**

True if both *boolean1* and *boolean2* are true. For example, the following statement prints the current input record if it contains both ‘2400’ and ‘foo’:

```
if ($0 ~ /2400/ && $0 ~ /foo/) print
```

The subexpression *boolean2* is evaluated only if *boolean1* is true. This can make a difference when *boolean2* contains expressions that have side effects. In the case of ‘`$0 ~ /foo/ && ($2 == bar++)`’, the variable `bar` is not incremented if there is no substring ‘foo’ in the record.

**`boolean1 || boolean2`**

True if at least one of *boolean1* or *boolean2* is true. For example, the following statement prints all records in the input that contain *either* ‘2400’ or ‘foo’ or both:

```
if ($0 ~ /2400/ || $0 ~ /foo/) print
```

The subexpression *boolean2* is evaluated only if *boolean1* is false. This can make a difference when *boolean2* contains expressions that have side effects.

**`! boolean`** True if *boolean* is false. For example, the following program prints ‘no home!’ in the unusual event that the `HOME` environment variable is not defined:

```
BEGIN { if (! ("HOME" in ENVIRON))
        print "no home!" }
```

(The `in` operator is described in [Section 8.1.2 \[Referring to an Array Element\]](#), page 136.)

The ‘`&&`’ and ‘`||`’ operators are called *short-circuit* operators because of the way they work. Evaluation of the full expression is “short-circuited” if the result can be determined part way through its evaluation.

Statements that use ‘`&&`’ or ‘`||`’ can be continued simply by putting a newline after them. But you cannot put a newline in front of either of these operators without using backslash continuation (see [Section 1.6 \[awk Statements Versus Lines\]](#), page 21).

The actual value of an expression using the ‘`!`’ operator is either one or zero, depending upon the truth value of the expression it is applied to. The ‘`!`’ operator is often useful for changing the sense of a flag variable from false to true and back again. For example, the following program is one way to print lines in between special bracketing lines:

```
$1 == "START" { interested = ! interested; next }
interested == 1 { print }
```

```
$1 == "END"      { interested = ! interested; next }
```

The variable `interested`, as with all `awk` variables, starts out initialized to zero, which is also false. When a line is seen whose first field is ‘START’, the value of `interested` is toggled to true, using ‘!’. The next rule prints lines as long as `interested` is true. When a line is seen whose first field is ‘END’, `interested` is toggled back to false.<sup>6</sup>

**NOTE:** The `next` statement is discussed in [Section 7.4.8 \[The next Statement\]](#), [page 124](#). `next` tells `awk` to skip the rest of the rules, get the next record, and start processing the rules over again at the top. The reason it’s there is to avoid printing the bracketing ‘START’ and ‘END’ lines.

### 6.3.4 Conditional Expressions

A *conditional expression* is a special kind of expression that has three operands. It allows you to use one expression’s value to select one of two other expressions. The conditional expression is the same as in the C language, as shown here:

```
selector ? if-true-exp : if-false-exp
```

There are three subexpressions. The first, *selector*, is always computed first. If it is “true” (not zero or not null), then *if-true-exp* is computed next and its value becomes the value of the whole expression. Otherwise, *if-false-exp* is computed next and its value becomes the value of the whole expression. For example, the following expression produces the absolute value of `x`:

```
x >= 0 ? x : -x
```

Each time the conditional expression is computed, only one of *if-true-exp* and *if-false-exp* is used; the other is ignored. This is important when the expressions have side effects. For example, this conditional expression examines element `i` of either array `a` or array `b`, and increments `i`:

```
x == y ? a[i++] : b[i++]
```

This is guaranteed to increment `i` exactly once, because each time only one of the two increment expressions is executed and the other is not. See [Chapter 8 \[Arrays in awk\]](#), [page 135](#), for more information about arrays.

As a minor `gawk` extension, a statement that uses ‘?:’ can be continued simply by putting a newline after either character. However, putting a newline in front of either character does not work without using backslash continuation (see [Section 1.6 \[awk Statements Versus Lines\]](#), [page 21](#)). If ‘--posix’ is specified (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), [page 25](#)), then this extension is disabled.

## 6.4 Function Calls

A *function* is a name for a particular calculation. This enables you to ask for it by name at any point in the program. For example, the function `sqrt()` computes the square root of a number.

A fixed set of functions are *built-in*, which means they are available in every `awk` program. The `sqrt()` function is one of these. See [Section 9.1 \[Built-in Functions\]](#), [page 147](#), for a list of built-in functions and their descriptions. In addition, you can define functions for

<sup>6</sup> This program has a bug; it prints lines starting with ‘END’. How would you fix it?

use in your program. See [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170, for instructions on how to do this.

The way to use a function is with a *function call* expression, which consists of the function name followed immediately by a list of *arguments* in parentheses. The arguments are expressions that provide the raw materials for the function's calculations. When there is more than one argument, they are separated by commas. If there are no arguments, just write '()' after the function name. The following examples show function calls with and without arguments:

```
sqrt(x^2 + y^2)      one argument
atan2(y, x)         two arguments
rand()              no arguments
```

**CAUTION:** Do not put any space between the function name and the open-parenthesis! A user-defined function name looks just like the name of a variable—a space would make the expression look like concatenation of a variable with an expression inside parentheses. With built-in functions, space before the parenthesis is harmless, but it is best not to get into the habit of using space to avoid mistakes with user-defined functions.

Each function expects a particular number of arguments. For example, the `sqrt()` function must be called with a single argument, the number of which to take the square root:

```
sqrt(argument)
```

Some of the built-in functions have one or more optional arguments. If those arguments are not supplied, the functions use a reasonable default value. See [Section 9.1 \[Built-in Functions\]](#), page 147, for full details. If arguments are omitted in calls to user-defined functions, then those arguments are treated as local variables and initialized to the empty string (see [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170).

As an advanced feature, `gawk` provides indirect function calls, which is a way to choose the function to call at runtime, instead of when you write the source code to your program. We defer discussion of this feature until later; see [Section 9.3 \[Indirect Function Calls\]](#), page 178.

Like every other expression, the function call has a value, which is computed by the function based on the arguments you give it. In this example, the value of '`sqrt(argument)`' is the square root of *argument*. The following program reads numbers, one number per line, and prints the square root of each one:

```
$ awk '{ print "The square root of", $1, "is", sqrt($1) }'
1
-| The square root of 1 is 1
3
-| The square root of 3 is 1.73205
5
-| The square root of 5 is 2.23607
Ctrl-d
```

A function can also have side effects, such as assigning values to certain variables or doing I/O. This program shows how the `match()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149) changes the variables `RSTART` and `RLENGTH`:

```

{
    if (match($1, $2))
        print RSTART, RLENGTH
    else
        print "no match"
}

```

Here is a sample run:

```

$ awk -f matchit.awk
aacdd c+
+ 3 2
foo bar
+ no match
abcdefg e
+ 5 1

```

## 6.5 Operator Precedence (How Operators Nest)

*Operator precedence* determines how operators are grouped when different operators appear close by in one expression. For example, ‘\*’ has higher precedence than ‘+’; thus, ‘a + b \* c’ means to multiply b and c, and then add a to the product (i.e., ‘a + (b \* c)’).

The normal precedence of the operators can be overruled by using parentheses. Think of the precedence rules as saying where the parentheses are assumed to be. In fact, it is wise to always use parentheses whenever there is an unusual combination of operators, because other people who read the program may not remember what the precedence is in this case. Even experienced programmers occasionally forget the exact rules, which leads to mistakes. Explicit parentheses help prevent any such mistakes.

When operators of equal precedence are used together, the leftmost operator groups first, except for the assignment, conditional, and exponentiation operators, which group in the opposite order. Thus, ‘a - b + c’ groups as ‘(a - b) + c’ and ‘a = b = c’ groups as ‘a = (b = c)’.

Normally the precedence of prefix unary operators does not matter, because there is only one way to interpret them: innermost first. Thus, ‘\$++i’ means ‘\$(++i)’ and ‘++\$x’ means ‘++(\$x)’. However, when another operator follows the operand, then the precedence of the unary operators can matter. ‘\$x^2’ means ‘(\$x)^2’, but ‘-x^2’ means ‘-(x^2)’, because ‘-’ has lower precedence than ‘^’, whereas ‘\$’ has higher precedence. Also, operators cannot be combined in a way that violates the precedence rules; for example, ‘\$\$0+--’ is not a valid expression because the first ‘\$’ has higher precedence than the ‘++’; to avoid the problem the expression can be rewritten as ‘\$( \$0++ )--’.

This table presents `awk`’s operators, in order of highest to lowest precedence:

(...)	Grouping.
\$	Field reference.
++ --	Increment, decrement.
^ **	Exponentiation. These operators group right-to-left.
+ - !	Unary plus, minus, logical “not.”

\* / %      Multiplication, division, remainder.

+ -        Addition, subtraction.

#### String Concatenation

There is no special symbol for concatenation. The operands are simply written side by side (see [Section 6.2.2 \[String Concatenation\]](#), page 96).

< <= == != > >= >> | |&

Relational and redirection. The relational operators and the redirections have the same precedence level. Characters such as ‘>’ serve both as relationals and as redirections; the context distinguishes between the two meanings.

Note that the I/O redirection operators in `print` and `printf` statements belong to the statement level, not to expressions. The redirection does not produce an expression that could be the operand of another operator. As a result, it does not make sense to use a redirection operator near another operator of lower precedence without parentheses. Such combinations (for example, ‘`print foo > a ? b : c`’), result in syntax errors. The correct way to write this statement is ‘`print foo > (a ? b : c)`’.

~ !~        Matching, nonmatching.

in         Array membership.

&&         Logical “and”.

||         Logical “or”.

?:         Conditional. This operator groups right-to-left.

= += -- \*= /= %= ^= \*\*=

Assignment. These operators group right-to-left.

**NOTE:** The ‘|&’, ‘\*\*’, and ‘\*\*=’ operators are not specified by POSIX. For maximum portability, do not use them.

## 6.6 Where You Are Makes A Difference

Modern systems support the notion of *locales*: a way to tell the system about the local character set and language.

Once upon a time, the locale setting used to affect regexp matching (see [Section A.7 \[Regexp Ranges and Locales: A Long Sad Story\]](#), page 306), but this is no longer true.

Locales can affect record splitting. For the normal case of ‘`RS = "\n"`’, the locale is largely irrelevant. For other single-character record separators, setting ‘`LC_ALL=C`’ in the environment will give you much better performance when reading records. Otherwise, `gawk` has to make several function calls, *per input character*, to find the record terminator.

According to POSIX, string comparison is also affected by locales (similar to regular expressions). The details are presented in [Section 6.3.2.3 \[String Comparison With POSIX Rules\]](#), page 105.

Finally, the locale affects the value of the decimal point character used when `gawk` parses input data. This is discussed in detail in [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\]](#), page 93.

## 7 Patterns, Actions, and Variables

As you have already seen, each `awk` statement consists of a pattern with an associated action. This chapter describes how you build patterns and actions, what kinds of things you can do within actions, and `awk`'s built-in variables.

The pattern-action rules and the statements available for use within actions form the core of `awk` programming. In a sense, everything covered up to here has been the foundation that programs are built on top of. Now it's time to start building something useful.

### 7.1 Pattern Elements

Patterns in `awk` control the execution of rules—a rule is executed when its pattern matches the current input record. The following is a summary of the types of `awk` patterns:

*/regular expression/*

A regular expression. It matches when the text of the input record fits the regular expression. (See [Chapter 3 \[Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37.)

*expression*

A single expression. It matches when its value is nonzero (if a number) or non-null (if a string). (See [Section 7.1.2 \[Expressions as Patterns\]](#), page 111.)

*pat1, pat2*

A pair of patterns separated by a comma, specifying a range of records. The range includes both the initial record that matches *pat1* and the final record that matches *pat2*. (See [Section 7.1.3 \[Specifying Record Ranges with Patterns\]](#), page 113.)

`BEGIN`

`END` Special patterns for you to supply startup or cleanup actions for your `awk` program. (See [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114.)

`BEGINFILE`

`ENDFILE` Special patterns for you to supply startup or cleanup actions to be done on a per file basis. (See [Section 7.1.5 \[The BEGINFILE and ENDFILE Special Patterns\]](#), page 115.)

*empty*

The empty pattern matches every input record. (See [Section 7.1.6 \[The Empty Pattern\]](#), page 116.)

#### 7.1.1 Regular Expressions as Patterns

Regular expressions are one of the first kinds of patterns presented in this book. This kind of pattern is simply a regexp constant in the pattern part of a rule. Its meaning is '`$0 ~ /pattern/`'. The pattern matches when the input record matches the regexp. For example:

```
/foo|bar|baz/ { buzzwords++ }
END           { print buzzwords, "buzzwords seen" }
```

#### 7.1.2 Expressions as Patterns

Any `awk` expression is valid as an `awk` pattern. The pattern matches if the expression's value is nonzero (if a number) or non-null (if a string). The expression is reevaluated each

time the rule is tested against a new input record. If the expression uses fields such as `$1`, the value depends directly on the new input record's text; otherwise, it depends on only what has happened so far in the execution of the `awk` program.

Comparison expressions, using the comparison operators described in [Section 6.3.2 \[Variable Typing and Comparison Expressions\]](#), page 102, are a very common kind of pattern. Regexp matching and nonmatching are also very common expressions. The left operand of the `~` and `!~` operators is a string. The right operand is either a constant regular expression enclosed in slashes (`/regexp/`), or any expression whose string value is used as a dynamic regular expression (see [Section 3.8 \[Using Dynamic Regexp\]](#), page 47). The following example prints the second field of each input record whose first field is precisely `'foo'`:

```
$ awk '$1 == "foo" { print $2 }' BBS-list
```

(There is no output, because there is no BBS site with the exact name `'foo'`.) Contrast this with the following regular expression match, which accepts any record with a first field that contains `'foo'`:

```
$ awk '$1 ~ /foo/ { print $2 }' BBS-list
+ 555-1234
+ 555-6699
+ 555-6480
+ 555-2127
```

A regexp constant as a pattern is also a special case of an expression pattern. The expression `/foo/` has the value one if `'foo'` appears in the current input record. Thus, as a pattern, `/foo/` matches any record containing `'foo'`.

Boolean expressions are also commonly used as patterns. Whether the pattern matches an input record depends on whether its subexpressions match. For example, the following command prints all the records in `'BBS-list'` that contain both `'2400'` and `'foo'`:

```
$ awk '/2400/ && /foo/' BBS-list
+ foey          555-1234      2400/1200/300    B
```

The following command prints all records in `'BBS-list'` that contain *either* `'2400'` or `'foo'` (or both, of course):

```
$ awk '/2400/ || /foo/' BBS-list
+ alpo-net      555-3412      2400/1200/300    A
+ bites         555-1675      2400/1200/300    A
+ foey          555-1234      2400/1200/300    B
+ foot         555-6699      1200/300          B
+ macfoo       555-6480      1200/300          A
+ sdace        555-3430      2400/1200/300    A
+ sabafoo      555-2127      1200/300          C
```

The following command prints all records in `'BBS-list'` that do *not* contain the string `'foo'`:

```
$ awk '! /foo/' BBS-list
+ aardvark     555-5553      1200/300          B
+ alpo-net     555-3412      2400/1200/300    A
+ barfly       555-7685      1200/300          A
```

⊖ bites	555-1675	2400/1200/300	A
⊖ camelot	555-0542	300	C
⊖ core	555-2912	1200/300	C
⊖ sdace	555-3430	2400/1200/300	A

The subexpressions of a Boolean operator in a pattern can be constant regular expressions, comparisons, or any other `awk` expressions. Range patterns are not expressions, so they cannot appear inside Boolean patterns. Likewise, the special patterns `BEGIN`, `END`, `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE`, which never match any input record, are not expressions and cannot appear inside Boolean patterns.

### 7.1.3 Specifying Record Ranges with Patterns

A *range pattern* is made of two patterns separated by a comma, in the form ‘*begpat*, *endpat*’. It is used to match ranges of consecutive input records. The first pattern, *begpat*, controls where the range begins, while *endpat* controls where the pattern ends. For example, the following:

```
awk '$1 == "on", $1 == "off"' myfile
```

prints every record in ‘myfile’ between ‘on’/‘off’ pairs, inclusive.

A range pattern starts out by matching *begpat* against every input record. When a record matches *begpat*, the range pattern is *turned on* and the range pattern matches this record as well. As long as the range pattern stays turned on, it automatically matches every input record read. The range pattern also matches *endpat* against every input record; when this succeeds, the range pattern is turned off again for the following record. Then the range pattern goes back to checking *begpat* against each record.

The record that turns on the range pattern and the one that turns it off both match the range pattern. If you don’t want to operate on these records, you can write `if` statements in the rule’s action to distinguish them from the records you are interested in.

It is possible for a pattern to be turned on and off by the same record. If the record satisfies both conditions, then the action is executed for just that record. For example, suppose there is text between two identical markers (e.g., the ‘%’ symbol), each on its own line, that should be ignored. A first attempt would be to combine a range pattern that describes the delimited text with the `next` statement (not discussed yet, see [Section 7.4.8 \[The next Statement\], page 124](#)). This causes `awk` to skip any further processing of the current record and start over again with the next input record. Such a program looks like this:

```
/^%$/ , /^%$/ { next }
{ print }
```

This program fails because the range pattern is both turned on and turned off by the first line, which just has a ‘%’ on it. To accomplish this task, write the program in the following manner, using a flag:

```
/^%$/ { skip = ! skip; next }
skip == 1 { next } # skip lines with ‘skip’ set
```

In a range pattern, the comma (‘,’) has the lowest precedence of all the operators (i.e., it is evaluated last). Thus, the following program attempts to combine a range pattern with another, simpler test:

```
echo Yes | awk '/1/,/2/ || /Yes/'
```

The intent of this program is `'(/1/,/2/) || /Yes/'`. However, `awk` interprets this as `'/1/, (/2/ || /Yes/).'`. This cannot be changed or worked around; range patterns do not combine with other patterns:

```
$ echo Yes | gawk '/1/,/2/) || /Yes/'
[error] gawk: cmd. line:1: (/1/,/2/) || /Yes/
[error] gawk: cmd. line:1:          ^ syntax error
```

## 7.1.4 The BEGIN and END Special Patterns

All the patterns described so far are for matching input records. The `BEGIN` and `END` special patterns are different. They supply startup and cleanup actions for `awk` programs. `BEGIN` and `END` rules must have actions; there is no default action for these rules because there is no current record when they run. `BEGIN` and `END` rules are often referred to as “`BEGIN` and `END` blocks” by long-time `awk` programmers.

### 7.1.4.1 Startup and Cleanup Actions

A `BEGIN` rule is executed once only, before the first input record is read. Likewise, an `END` rule is executed once only, after all the input is read. For example:

```
$ awk '
> BEGIN { print "Analysis of \"foo\"" }
> /foo/ { ++n }
> END   { print "\"foo\" appears", n, "times." }' BBS-list
+ Analysis of "foo"
+ "foo" appears 4 times.
```

This program finds the number of records in the input file `'BBS-list'` that contain the string `'foo'`. The `BEGIN` rule prints a title for the report. There is no need to use the `BEGIN` rule to initialize the counter `n` to zero, since `awk` does this automatically (see [Section 6.1.3 \[Variables\], page 92](#)). The second rule increments the variable `n` every time a record containing the pattern `'foo'` is read. The `END` rule prints the value of `n` at the end of the run.

The special patterns `BEGIN` and `END` cannot be used in ranges or with Boolean operators (indeed, they cannot be used with any operators). An `awk` program may have multiple `BEGIN` and/or `END` rules. They are executed in the order in which they appear: all the `BEGIN` rules at startup and all the `END` rules at termination. `BEGIN` and `END` rules may be intermixed with other rules. This feature was added in the 1987 version of `awk` and is included in the POSIX standard. The original (1978) version of `awk` required the `BEGIN` rule to be placed at the beginning of the program, the `END` rule to be placed at the end, and only allowed one of each. This is no longer required, but it is a good idea to follow this template in terms of program organization and readability.

Multiple `BEGIN` and `END` rules are useful for writing library functions, because each library file can have its own `BEGIN` and/or `END` rule to do its own initialization and/or cleanup. The order in which library functions are named on the command line controls the order in which their `BEGIN` and `END` rules are executed. Therefore, you have to be careful when writing such rules in library files so that the order in which they are executed doesn't matter. See [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\], page 25](#), for more information on using library

functions. See [Chapter 12 \[A Library of awk Functions\]](#), page 211, for a number of useful library functions.

If an `awk` program has only `BEGIN` rules and no other rules, then the program exits after the `BEGIN` rule is run.<sup>1</sup> However, if an `END` rule exists, then the input is read, even if there are no other rules in the program. This is necessary in case the `END` rule checks the `FNR` and `NR` variables.

#### 7.1.4.2 Input/Output from BEGIN and END Rules

There are several (sometimes subtle) points to remember when doing I/O from a `BEGIN` or `END` rule. The first has to do with the value of `$0` in a `BEGIN` rule. Because `BEGIN` rules are executed before any input is read, there simply is no input record, and therefore no fields, when executing `BEGIN` rules. References to `$0` and the fields yield a null string or zero, depending upon the context. One way to give `$0` a real value is to execute a `getline` command without a variable (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with getline\]](#), page 67). Another way is simply to assign a value to `$0`.

The second point is similar to the first but from the other direction. Traditionally, due largely to implementation issues, `$0` and `NF` were *undefined* inside an `END` rule. The POSIX standard specifies that `NF` is available in an `END` rule. It contains the number of fields from the last input record. Most probably due to an oversight, the standard does not say that `$0` is also preserved, although logically one would think that it should be. In fact, `gawk` does preserve the value of `$0` for use in `END` rules. Be aware, however, that Brian Kernighan's `awk`, and possibly other implementations, do not.

The third point follows from the first two. The meaning of `'print'` inside a `BEGIN` or `END` rule is the same as always: `'print $0'`. If `$0` is the null string, then this prints an empty record. Many long time `awk` programmers use an unadorned `'print'` in `BEGIN` and `END` rules, to mean `'print ""'`, relying on `$0` being null. Although one might generally get away with this in `BEGIN` rules, it is a very bad idea in `END` rules, at least in `gawk`. It is also poor style, since if an empty line is needed in the output, the program should print one explicitly.

Finally, the `next` and `nextfile` statements are not allowed in a `BEGIN` rule, because the implicit read-a-record-and-match-against-the-rules loop has not started yet. Similarly, those statements are not valid in an `END` rule, since all the input has been read. (See [Section 7.4.8 \[The next Statement\]](#), page 124, and see [Section 7.4.9 \[Using gawk's nextfile Statement\]](#), page 125.)

### 7.1.5 The BEGINFILE and ENDFILE Special Patterns

This section describes a `gawk`-specific feature.

Two special kinds of rule, `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE`, give you “hooks” into `gawk`'s command-line file processing loop. As with the `BEGIN` and `END` rules (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114), all `BEGINFILE` rules in a program are merged, in the order they are read by `gawk`, and all `ENDFILE` rules are merged as well.

The body of the `BEGINFILE` rules is executed just before `gawk` reads the first record from a file. `FILENAME` is set to the name of the current file, and `FNR` is set to zero.

---

<sup>1</sup> The original version of `awk` kept reading and ignoring input until the end of the file was seen.

The `BEGINFILE` rule provides you the opportunity for two tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to perform:

- You can test if the file is readable. Normally, it is a fatal error if a file named on the command line cannot be opened for reading. However, you can bypass the fatal error and move on to the next file on the command line.

You do this by checking if the `ERRNO` variable is not the empty string; if so, then `gawk` was not able to open the file. In this case, your program can execute the `nextfile` statement (see [Section 7.4.9 \[Using `gawk`'s `nextfile` Statement\]](#), page 125). This causes `gawk` to skip the file entirely. Otherwise, `gawk` exits with the usual fatal error.

- If you have written extensions that modify the record handling (by inserting an “open hook”), you can invoke them at this point, before `gawk` has started processing the file. (This is a *very* advanced feature, currently used only by the [XMLgawk project](#).)

The `ENDFILE` rule is called when `gawk` has finished processing the last record in an input file. For the last input file, it will be called before any `END` rules.

Normally, when an error occurs when reading input in the normal input processing loop, the error is fatal. However, if an `ENDFILE` rule is present, the error becomes non-fatal, and instead `ERRNO` is set. This makes it possible to catch and process I/O errors at the level of the `awk` program.

The `next` statement (see [Section 7.4.8 \[The `next` Statement\]](#), page 124) is not allowed inside either a `BEGINFILE` or and `ENDFILE` rule. The `nextfile` statement (see [Section 7.4.9 \[Using `gawk`'s `nextfile` Statement\]](#), page 125) is allowed only inside a `BEGINFILE` rule, but not inside an `ENDFILE` rule.

The `getline` statement (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with `getline`\]](#), page 67) is restricted inside both `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE`. Only the ‘`getline variable < file`’ form is allowed.

`BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE` are `gawk` extensions. In most other `awk` implementations, or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), they are not special.

### 7.1.6 The Empty Pattern

An empty (i.e., nonexistent) pattern is considered to match *every* input record. For example, the program:

```
awk '{ print $1 }' BBS-list
```

prints the first field of every record.

## 7.2 Using Shell Variables in Programs

`awk` programs are often used as components in larger programs written in shell. For example, it is very common to use a shell variable to hold a pattern that the `awk` program searches for. There are two ways to get the value of the shell variable into the body of the `awk` program.

The most common method is to use shell quoting to substitute the variable’s value into the program inside the script. For example, in the following program:

```
printf "Enter search pattern: "
read pattern
awk "/$pattern/ '{ nmatches++ }' /path/to/data
    END { print nmatches, "found" }'
```

the `awk` program consists of two pieces of quoted text that are concatenated together to form the program. The first part is double-quoted, which allows substitution of the `pattern` shell variable inside the quotes. The second part is single-quoted.

Variable substitution via quoting works, but can be potentially messy. It requires a good understanding of the shell's quoting rules (see [Section 1.1.6 \[Shell-Quoting Issues\]](#), page 15), and it's often difficult to correctly match up the quotes when reading the program.

A better method is to use `awk`'s variable assignment feature (see [Section 6.1.3.2 \[Assigning Variables on the Command Line\]](#), page 92) to assign the shell variable's value to an `awk` variable's value. Then use dynamic regexps to match the pattern (see [Section 3.8 \[Using Dynamic Regexps\]](#), page 47). The following shows how to redo the previous example using this technique:

```
printf "Enter search pattern: "
read pattern
awk -v pat="$pattern" '$0 ~ pat { nmatches++ }' /path/to/data
    END { print nmatches, "found" }'
```

Now, the `awk` program is just one single-quoted string. The assignment `'-v pat="$pattern"'` still requires double quotes, in case there is whitespace in the value of `$pattern`. The `awk` variable `pat` could be named `pattern` too, but that would be more confusing. Using a variable also provides more flexibility, since the variable can be used anywhere inside the program—for printing, as an array subscript, or for any other use—without requiring the quoting tricks at every point in the program.

## 7.3 Actions

An `awk` program or script consists of a series of rules and function definitions interspersed. (Functions are described later. See [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170.) A rule contains a pattern and an action, either of which (but not both) may be omitted. The purpose of the *action* is to tell `awk` what to do once a match for the pattern is found. Thus, in outline, an `awk` program generally looks like this:

```
[pattern] { action }
pattern [{ action }]
...
function name(args) { ... }
...
```

An action consists of one or more `awk statements`, enclosed in curly braces (`{...}`). Each statement specifies one thing to do. The statements are separated by newlines or semicolons. The curly braces around an action must be used even if the action contains only one statement, or if it contains no statements at all. However, if you omit the action entirely, omit the curly braces as well. An omitted action is equivalent to `'{ print $0 }'`:

```
/foo/ { }      match foo, do nothing — empty action
/foo/        match foo, print the record — omitted action
```

The following types of statements are supported in `awk`:

**Expressions**

Call functions or assign values to variables (see [Chapter 6 \[Expressions\]](#), page 89). Executing this kind of statement simply computes the value of the expression. This is useful when the expression has side effects (see [Section 6.2.3 \[Assignment Expressions\]](#), page 98).

**Control statements**

Specify the control flow of `awk` programs. The `awk` language gives you C-like constructs (`if`, `for`, `while`, and `do`) as well as a few special ones (see [Section 7.4 \[Control Statements in Actions\]](#), page 118).

**Compound statements**

Consist of one or more statements enclosed in curly braces. A compound statement is used in order to put several statements together in the body of an `if`, `while`, `do`, or `for` statement.

**Input statements**

Use the `getline` command (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with getline\]](#), page 67). Also supplied in `awk` are the `next` statement (see [Section 7.4.8 \[The next Statement\]](#), page 124), and the `nextfile` statement (see [Section 7.4.9 \[Using gawk's nextfile Statement\]](#), page 125).

**Output statements**

Such as `print` and `printf`. See [Chapter 5 \[Printing Output\]](#), page 73.

**Deletion statements**

For deleting array elements. See [Section 8.2 \[The delete Statement\]](#), page 139.

## 7.4 Control Statements in Actions

*Control statements*, such as `if`, `while`, and so on, control the flow of execution in `awk` programs. Most of `awk`'s control statements are patterned after similar statements in C.

All the control statements start with special keywords, such as `if` and `while`, to distinguish them from simple expressions. Many control statements contain other statements. For example, the `if` statement contains another statement that may or may not be executed. The contained statement is called the *body*. To include more than one statement in the body, group them into a single *compound statement* with curly braces, separating them with newlines or semicolons.

### 7.4.1 The if-else Statement

The `if-else` statement is `awk`'s decision-making statement. It looks like this:

```
if (condition) then-body [else else-body]
```

The *condition* is an expression that controls what the rest of the statement does. If the *condition* is true, *then-body* is executed; otherwise, *else-body* is executed. The `else` part of the statement is optional. The condition is considered false if its value is zero or the null string; otherwise, the condition is true. Refer to the following:

```
if (x % 2 == 0)
    print "x is even"
else
```

```
print "x is odd"
```

In this example, if the expression `'x % 2 == 0'` is true (that is, if the value of `x` is evenly divisible by two), then the first `print` statement is executed; otherwise, the second `print` statement is executed. If the `else` keyword appears on the same line as *then-body* and *then-body* is not a compound statement (i.e., not surrounded by curly braces), then a semicolon must separate *then-body* from the `else`. To illustrate this, the previous example can be rewritten as:

```
if (x % 2 == 0) print "x is even"; else
    print "x is odd"
```

If the `;` is left out, `awk` can't interpret the statement and it produces a syntax error. Don't actually write programs this way, because a human reader might fail to see the `else` if it is not the first thing on its line.

### 7.4.2 The while Statement

In programming, a *loop* is a part of a program that can be executed two or more times in succession. The `while` statement is the simplest looping statement in `awk`. It repeatedly executes a statement as long as a condition is true. For example:

```
while (condition)
    body
```

*body* is a statement called the *body* of the loop, and *condition* is an expression that controls how long the loop keeps running. The first thing the `while` statement does is test the *condition*. If the *condition* is true, it executes the statement *body*. After *body* has been executed, *condition* is tested again, and if it is still true, *body* is executed again. This process repeats until the *condition* is no longer true. If the *condition* is initially false, the body of the loop is never executed and `awk` continues with the statement following the loop. This example prints the first three fields of each record, one per line:

```
awk '{
    i = 1
    while (i <= 3) {
        print $i
        i++
    }
}' inventory-shipped
```

The body of this loop is a compound statement enclosed in braces, containing two statements. The loop works in the following manner: first, the value of `i` is set to one. Then, the `while` statement tests whether `i` is less than or equal to three. This is true when `i` equals one, so the `i`-th field is printed. Then the `'i++'` increments the value of `i` and the loop repeats. The loop terminates when `i` reaches four.

A newline is not required between the condition and the body; however using one makes the program clearer unless the body is a compound statement or else is very simple. The newline after the open-brace that begins the compound statement is not required either, but the program is harder to read without it.

### 7.4.3 The do-while Statement

The `do` loop is a variation of the `while` looping statement. The `do` loop executes the *body* once and then repeats the *body* as long as the *condition* is true. It looks like this:

```
do
  body
while (condition)
```

Even if the *condition* is false at the start, the *body* is executed at least once (and only once, unless executing *body* makes *condition* true). Contrast this with the corresponding `while` statement:

```
while (condition)
  body
```

This statement does not execute *body* even once if the *condition* is false to begin with. The following is an example of a `do` statement:

```
{
    i = 1
    do {
        print $0
        i++
    } while (i <= 10)
}
```

This program prints each input record 10 times. However, it isn't a very realistic example, since in this case an ordinary `while` would do just as well. This situation reflects actual experience; only occasionally is there a real use for a `do` statement.

### 7.4.4 The for Statement

The `for` statement makes it more convenient to count iterations of a loop. The general form of the `for` statement looks like this:

```
for (initialization; condition; increment)
  body
```

The *initialization*, *condition*, and *increment* parts are arbitrary `awk` expressions, and *body* stands for any `awk` statement.

The `for` statement starts by executing *initialization*. Then, as long as the *condition* is true, it repeatedly executes *body* and then *increment*. Typically, *initialization* sets a variable to either zero or one, *increment* adds one to it, and *condition* compares it against the desired number of iterations. For example:

```
awk '{
    for (i = 1; i <= 3; i++)
        print $i
}' inventory-shipped
```

This prints the first three fields of each input record, with one field per line.

It isn't possible to set more than one variable in the *initialization* part without using a multiple assignment statement such as '`x = y = 0`'. This makes sense only if all the initial values are equal. (But it is possible to initialize additional variables by writing their assignments as separate statements preceding the `for` loop.)

The same is true of the *increment* part. Incrementing additional variables requires separate statements at the end of the loop. The C compound expression, using C's comma operator, is useful in this context but it is not supported in `awk`.

Most often, *increment* is an increment expression, as in the previous example. But this is not required; it can be any expression whatsoever. For example, the following statement prints all the powers of two between 1 and 100:

```
for (i = 1; i <= 100; i *= 2)
    print i
```

If there is nothing to be done, any of the three expressions in the parentheses following the `for` keyword may be omitted. Thus, `'for (; x > 0;)'` is equivalent to `'while (x > 0)'`. If the *condition* is omitted, it is treated as true, effectively yielding an *infinite loop* (i.e., a loop that never terminates).

In most cases, a `for` loop is an abbreviation for a `while` loop, as shown here:

```
initialization
while (condition) {
    body
    increment
}
```

The only exception is when the `continue` statement (see [Section 7.4.7 \[The continue Statement\], page 123](#)) is used inside the loop. Changing a `for` statement to a `while` statement in this way can change the effect of the `continue` statement inside the loop.

The `awk` language has a `for` statement in addition to a `while` statement because a `for` loop is often both less work to type and more natural to think of. Counting the number of iterations is very common in loops. It can be easier to think of this counting as part of looping rather than as something to do inside the loop.

There is an alternate version of the `for` loop, for iterating over all the indices of an array:

```
for (i in array)
    do something with array[i]
```

See [Section 8.1.5 \[Scanning All Elements of an Array\], page 138](#), for more information on this version of the `for` loop.

## 7.4.5 The switch Statement

The `switch` statement allows the evaluation of an expression and the execution of statements based on a `case` match. Case statements are checked for a match in the order they are defined. If no suitable `case` is found, the `default` section is executed, if supplied.

Each `case` contains a single constant, be it numeric, string, or regexp. The `switch` expression is evaluated, and then each `case`'s constant is compared against the result in turn. The type of constant determines the comparison: numeric or string do the usual comparisons. A regexp constant does a regular expression match against the string value of the original expression. The general form of the `switch` statement looks like this:

```
switch (expression) {
case value or regular expression:
    case-body
default:
```

```

    default-body
}

```

Control flow in the `switch` statement works as it does in C. Once a match to a given case is made, the case statement bodies execute until a `break`, `continue`, `next`, `nextfile` or `exit` is encountered, or the end of the `switch` statement itself. For example:

```

switch (NR * 2 + 1) {
case 3:
case "11":
    print NR - 1
    break

case /2[[:digit:]]+/:
    print NR

default:
    print NR + 1

case -1:
    print NR * -1
}

```

Note that if none of the statements specified above halt execution of a matched `case` statement, execution falls through to the next `case` until execution halts. In the above example, for any case value starting with ‘2’ followed by one or more digits, the `print` statement is executed and then falls through into the `default` section, executing its `print` statement. In turn, the `-1` case will also be executed since the `default` does not halt execution.

This `switch` statement is a `gawk` extension. If `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), it is not available.

### 7.4.6 The `break` Statement

The `break` statement jumps out of the innermost `for`, `while`, or `do` loop that encloses it. The following example finds the smallest divisor of any integer, and also identifies prime numbers:

```

# find smallest divisor of num
{
    num = $1
    for (div = 2; div * div <= num; div++) {
        if (num % div == 0)
            break
    }
    if (num % div == 0)
        printf "Smallest divisor of %d is %d\n", num, div
    else
        printf "%d is prime\n", num
}

```

When the remainder is zero in the first `if` statement, `awk` immediately *breaks out* of the containing `for` loop. This means that `awk` proceeds immediately to the statement following the loop and continues processing. (This is very different from the `exit` statement, which stops the entire `awk` program. See [Section 7.4.10 \[The `exit` Statement\]](#), page 125.)

The following program illustrates how the *condition* of a `for` or `while` statement could be replaced with a `break` inside an `if`:

```
# find smallest divisor of num
{
  num = $1
  for (div = 2; ; div++) {
    if (num % div == 0) {
      printf "Smallest divisor of %d is %d\n", num, div
      break
    }
    if (div * div > num) {
      printf "%d is prime\n", num
      break
    }
  }
}
```

The `break` statement is also used to break out of the `switch` statement. This is discussed in [Section 7.4.5 \[The `switch` Statement\]](#), page 121.

The `break` statement has no meaning when used outside the body of a loop or `switch`. However, although it was never documented, historical implementations of `awk` treated the `break` statement outside of a loop as if it were a `next` statement (see [Section 7.4.8 \[The `next` Statement\]](#), page 124). Recent versions of Brian Kernighan's `awk` no longer allow this usage, nor does `gawk`.



## 7.4.7 The `continue` Statement

Similar to `break`, the `continue` statement is used only inside `for`, `while`, and `do` loops. It skips over the rest of the loop body, causing the next cycle around the loop to begin immediately. Contrast this with `break`, which jumps out of the loop altogether.

The `continue` statement in a `for` loop directs `awk` to skip the rest of the body of the loop and resume execution with the increment-expression of the `for` statement. The following program illustrates this fact:

```
BEGIN {
  for (x = 0; x <= 20; x++) {
    if (x == 5)
      continue
    printf "%d ", x
  }
  print ""
}
```

This program prints all the numbers from 0 to 20—except for 5, for which the `printf` is skipped. Because the increment ‘`x++`’ is not skipped, `x` does not remain stuck at 5. Contrast the `for` loop from the previous example with the following `while` loop:

```
BEGIN {
    x = 0
    while (x <= 20) {
        if (x == 5)
            continue
        printf "%d ", x
        x++
    }
    print ""
}
```

This program loops forever once `x` reaches 5.

The `continue` statement has no special meaning with respect to the `switch` statement, nor does it any meaning when used outside the body of a loop. Historical versions of `awk` treated a `continue` statement outside a loop the same way they treated a `break` statement outside a loop: as if it were a `next` statement (see [Section 7.4.8 \[The next Statement\]](#), [page 124](#)). Recent versions of Brian Kernighan’s `awk` no longer work this way, nor does `gawk`.



### 7.4.8 The next Statement

The `next` statement forces `awk` to immediately stop processing the current record and go on to the next record. This means that no further rules are executed for the current record, and the rest of the current rule’s action isn’t executed.

Contrast this with the effect of the `getline` function (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with getline\]](#), [page 67](#)). That also causes `awk` to read the next record immediately, but it does not alter the flow of control in any way (i.e., the rest of the current action executes with a new input record).

At the highest level, `awk` program execution is a loop that reads an input record and then tests each rule’s pattern against it. If you think of this loop as a `for` statement whose body contains the rules, then the `next` statement is analogous to a `continue` statement. It skips to the end of the body of this implicit loop and executes the increment (which reads another record).

For example, suppose an `awk` program works only on records with four fields, and it shouldn’t fail when given bad input. To avoid complicating the rest of the program, write a “weed out” rule near the beginning, in the following manner:

```
NF != 4 {
    err = sprintf("%s:%d: skipped: NF != 4\n", FILENAME, FNR)
    print err > "/dev/stderr"
    next
}
```

Because of the `next` statement, the program’s subsequent rules won’t see the bad record. The error message is redirected to the standard error output stream, as error messages should be. For more detail see [Section 5.7 \[Special File Names in gawk\]](#), [page 84](#).

If the `next` statement causes the end of the input to be reached, then the code in any `END` rules is executed. See [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114.

The `next` statement is not allowed inside `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE` rules. See [Section 7.1.5 \[The BEGINFILE and ENDFILE Special Patterns\]](#), page 115.

According to the POSIX standard, the behavior is undefined if the `next` statement is used in a `BEGIN` or `END` rule. `gawk` treats it as a syntax error. Although POSIX permits it, some other `awk` implementations don't allow the `next` statement inside function bodies (see [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170). Just as with any other `next` statement, a `next` statement inside a function body reads the next record and starts processing it with the first rule in the program.

### 7.4.9 Using `gawk`'s `nextfile` Statement

`gawk` provides the `nextfile` statement, which is similar to the `next` statement. (c.e.) However, instead of abandoning processing of the current record, the `nextfile` statement instructs `gawk` to stop processing the current data file.

The `nextfile` statement is a `gawk` extension. In most other `awk` implementations, or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), `nextfile` is not special.

Upon execution of the `nextfile` statement, any `ENDFILE` rules are executed, `FILENAME` is updated to the name of the next data file listed on the command line, `FNR` is reset to one, `ARGIND` is incremented, any `BEGINFILE` rules are executed, and processing starts over with the first rule in the program. (`ARGIND` hasn't been introduced yet. See [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126.) If the `nextfile` statement causes the end of the input to be reached, then the code in any `END` rules is executed. See [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114.

The `nextfile` statement is useful when there are many data files to process but it isn't necessary to process every record in every file. Normally, in order to move on to the next data file, a program has to continue scanning the unwanted records. The `nextfile` statement accomplishes this much more efficiently.

In addition, `nextfile` is useful inside a `BEGINFILE` rule to skip over a file that would otherwise cause `gawk` to exit with a fatal error. See [Section 7.1.5 \[The BEGINFILE and ENDFILE Special Patterns\]](#), page 115.

While one might think that `'close(FILENAME)'` would accomplish the same as `nextfile`, this isn't true. `close()` is reserved for closing files, pipes, and coprocesses that are opened with redirections. It is not related to the main processing that `awk` does with the files listed in `ARGV`.

The current version of the Brian Kernighan's `awk` (see [Section B.5 \[Other Freely Available awk Implementations\]](#), page 321) also supports `nextfile`. However, it doesn't allow the `nextfile` statement inside function bodies (see [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170). `gawk` does; a `nextfile` inside a function body reads the next record and starts processing it with the first rule in the program, just as any other `nextfile` statement.

### 7.4.10 The `exit` Statement

The `exit` statement causes `awk` to immediately stop executing the current rule and to stop processing input; any remaining input is ignored. The `exit` statement is written as follows:

```
exit [return code]
```

When an `exit` statement is executed from a `BEGIN` rule, the program stops processing everything immediately. No input records are read. However, if an `END` rule is present, as part of executing the `exit` statement, the `END` rule is executed (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114). If `exit` is used in the body of an `END` rule, it causes the program to stop immediately.

An `exit` statement that is not part of a `BEGIN` or `END` rule stops the execution of any further automatic rules for the current record, skips reading any remaining input records, and executes the `END` rule if there is one. Any `ENDFILE` rules are also skipped; they are not executed.

In such a case, if you don't want the `END` rule to do its job, set a variable to nonzero before the `exit` statement and check that variable in the `END` rule. See [Section 12.2.2 \[Assertions\]](#), page 214, for an example that does this.

If an argument is supplied to `exit`, its value is used as the exit status code for the `awk` process. If no argument is supplied, `exit` causes `awk` to return a “success” status. In the case where an argument is supplied to a first `exit` statement, and then `exit` is called a second time from an `END` rule with no argument, `awk` uses the previously supplied exit value.

See [Section 2.6 \[gawk's Exit Status\]](#), page 33, for more information.

For example, suppose an error condition occurs that is difficult or impossible to handle. Conventionally, programs report this by exiting with a nonzero status. An `awk` program can do this using an `exit` statement with a nonzero argument, as shown in the following example:

```
BEGIN {
    if (("date" | getline date_now) <= 0) {
        print "Can't get system date" > "/dev/stderr"
        exit 1
    }
    print "current date is", date_now
    close("date")
}
```

**NOTE:** For full portability, exit values should be between zero and 126, inclusive. Negative values, and values of 127 or greater, may not produce consistent results across different operating systems.

## 7.5 Built-in Variables

Most `awk` variables are available to use for your own purposes; they never change unless your program assigns values to them, and they never affect anything unless your program examines them. However, a few variables in `awk` have special built-in meanings. `awk` examines some of these automatically, so that they enable you to tell `awk` how to do certain things. Others are set automatically by `awk`, so that they carry information from the internal workings of `awk` to your program.

This section documents all the built-in variables of `gawk`, most of which are also documented in the chapters describing their areas of activity.

### 7.5.1 Built-in Variables That Control `awk`

The following is an alphabetical list of variables that you can change to control how `awk` does certain things. The variables that are specific to `gawk` are marked with a pound sign (`#`).

**BINMODE #** On non-POSIX systems, this variable specifies use of binary mode for all I/O. Numeric values of one, two, or three specify that input files, output files, or all files, respectively, should use binary I/O. A numeric value less than zero is treated as zero, and a numeric value greater than three is treated as three. Alternatively, string values of `"r"` or `"w"` specify that input files and output files, respectively, should use binary I/O. A string value of `"rw"` or `"wr"` indicates that all files should use binary I/O. Any other string value is treated the same as `"rw"`, but causes `gawk` to generate a warning message. `BINMODE` is described in more detail in [Section B.3.1.4 \[Using `gawk` on PC Operating Systems\]](#), page 317. This variable is a `gawk` extension. In other `awk` implementations (except `mawk`, see [Section B.5 \[Other Freely Available `awk` Implementations\]](#), page 321), or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), it is not special.

**CONVFMT** This string controls conversion of numbers to strings (see [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\]](#), page 93). It works by being passed, in effect, as the first argument to the `sprintf()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). Its default value is `%.6g`. `CONVFMT` was introduced by the POSIX standard.

**FIELDWIDTHS #**

This is a space-separated list of columns that tells `gawk` how to split input with fixed columnar boundaries. Assigning a value to `FIELDWIDTHS` overrides the use of `FS` and `FPAT` for field splitting. See [Section 4.6 \[Reading Fixed-Width Data\]](#), page 61, for more information.

If `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), then `FIELDWIDTHS` has no special meaning, and field-splitting operations occur based exclusively on the value of `FS`.

**FPAT #** This is a regular expression (as a string) that tells `gawk` to create the fields based on text that matches the regular expression. Assigning a value to `FPAT` overrides the use of `FS` and `FIELDWIDTHS` for field splitting. See [Section 4.7 \[Defining Fields By Content\]](#), page 63, for more information.

If `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), then `FPAT` has no special meaning, and field-splitting operations occur based exclusively on the value of `FS`.

**FS** This is the input field separator (see [Section 4.5 \[Specifying How Fields Are Separated\]](#), page 56). The value is a single-character string or a multi-character regular expression that matches the separations between fields in an input record. If the value is the null string (`""`), then each character in the record becomes a separate field. (This behavior is a `gawk` extension. POSIX `awk` does not specify the behavior when `FS` is the null string. Nonetheless, some other versions of `awk` also treat `""` specially.)

The default value is " ", a string consisting of a single space. As a special exception, this value means that any sequence of spaces, TABs, and/or newlines is a single separator.<sup>2</sup> It also causes spaces, TABs, and newlines at the beginning and end of a record to be ignored.

You can set the value of FS on the command line using the '-F' option:

```
awk -F, 'program' input-files
```

If `gawk` is using `FIELDWIDTHS` or `FPAT` for field splitting, assigning a value to `FS` causes `gawk` to return to the normal, `FS`-based field splitting. An easy way to do this is to simply say '`FS = FS`', perhaps with an explanatory comment.

#### IGNORECASE #

If `IGNORECASE` is nonzero or non-null, then all string comparisons and all regular expression matching are case independent. Thus, regexp matching with '`~`' and '`!~`', as well as the `gensub()`, `gsub()`, `index()`, `match()`, `patsplit()`, `split()`, and `sub()` functions, record termination with `RS`, and field splitting with `FS` and `FPAT`, all ignore case when doing their particular regexp operations. However, the value of `IGNORECASE` does *not* affect array subscripting and it does not affect field splitting when using a single-character field separator. See [Section 3.6 \[Case Sensitivity in Matching\]](#), page 45.

If `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), then `IGNORECASE` has no special meaning. Thus, string and regexp operations are always case-sensitive.

#### LINT #

When this variable is true (nonzero or non-null), `gawk` behaves as if the '`--lint`' command-line option is in effect. (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25). With a value of "`fatal`", lint warnings become fatal errors. With a value of "`invalid`", only warnings about things that are actually invalid are issued. (This is not fully implemented yet.) Any other true value prints nonfatal warnings. Assigning a false value to `LINT` turns off the lint warnings.

This variable is a `gawk` extension. It is not special in other `awk` implementations. Unlike the other special variables, changing `LINT` does affect the production of lint warnings, even if `gawk` is in compatibility mode. Much as the '`--lint`' and '`--traditional`' options independently control different aspects of `gawk`'s behavior, the control of lint warnings during program execution is independent of the flavor of `awk` being executed.

#### OFMT

This string controls conversion of numbers to strings (see [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\]](#), page 93) for printing with the `print` statement. It works by being passed as the first argument to the `sprintf()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). Its default value is "`%.6g`". Earlier versions of `awk` also used `OFMT` to specify the format for converting numbers to strings in general expressions; this is now done by `CONVFMT`.

#### OFS

This is the output field separator (see [Section 5.3 \[Output Separators\]](#), page 75). It is output between the fields printed by a `print` statement. Its default value is " ", a string consisting of a single space.

---

<sup>2</sup> In POSIX `awk`, newline does not count as whitespace.

- ORS** This is the output record separator. It is output at the end of every `print` statement. Its default value is `"\n"`, the newline character. (See [Section 5.3 \[Output Separators\]](#), page 75.)
- RS** This is `awk`'s input record separator. Its default value is a string containing a single newline character, which means that an input record consists of a single line of text. It can also be the null string, in which case records are separated by runs of blank lines. If it is a regexp, records are separated by matches of the regexp in the input text. (See [Section 4.1 \[How Input Is Split into Records\]](#), page 49.)
- The ability for `RS` to be a regular expression is a `gawk` extension. In most other `awk` implementations, or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), just the first character of `RS`'s value is used.
- SUBSEP** This is the subscript separator. It has the default value of `"\034"` and is used to separate the parts of the indices of a multidimensional array. Thus, the expression `foo["A", "B"]` really accesses `foo["A\034B"]` (see [Section 8.5 \[Multidimensional Arrays\]](#), page 142).
- TEXTDOMAIN #**
- This variable is used for internationalization of programs at the `awk` level. It sets the default text domain for specially marked string constants in the source text, as well as for the `dcgettext()`, `dcngettext()` and `bindtextdomain()` functions (see [Chapter 10 \[Internationalization with gawk\]](#), page 185). The default value of `TEXTDOMAIN` is `"messages"`.
- This variable is a `gawk` extension. In other `awk` implementations, or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), it is not special.

## 7.5.2 Built-in Variables That Convey Information

The following is an alphabetical list of variables that `awk` sets automatically on certain occasions in order to provide information to your program. The variables that are specific to `gawk` are marked with a pound sign (`#`).

### **ARGC, ARGV**

The command-line arguments available to `awk` programs are stored in an array called `ARGV`. `ARGC` is the number of command-line arguments present. See [Section 2.3 \[Other Command-Line Arguments\]](#), page 30. Unlike most `awk` arrays, `ARGV` is indexed from 0 to `ARGC - 1`. In the following example:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN {
>     for (i = 0; i < ARGC; i++)
>         print ARGV[i]
>     }' inventory-shipped BBS-list
+ awk
+ inventory-shipped
+ BBS-list
```

`ARGV[0]` contains `'awk'`, `ARGV[1]` contains `'inventory-shipped'`, and `ARGV[2]` contains `'BBS-list'`. The value of `ARGC` is three, one more than the index of the last element in `ARGV`, because the elements are numbered from zero.

The names `ARGC` and `ARGV`, as well as the convention of indexing the array from 0 to `ARGC - 1`, are derived from the C language's method of accessing command-line arguments.

The value of `ARGV[0]` can vary from system to system. Also, you should note that the program text is *not* included in `ARGV`, nor are any of `awk`'s command-line options. See [Section 7.5.3 \[Using `ARGC` and `ARGV`\]](#), page 133, for information about how `awk` uses these variables.



**ARGIND #** The index in `ARGV` of the current file being processed. Every time `gawk` opens a new data file for processing, it sets `ARGIND` to the index in `ARGV` of the file name. When `gawk` is processing the input files, `'FILENAME == ARGV[ARGIND]'` is always true.

This variable is useful in file processing; it allows you to tell how far along you are in the list of data files as well as to distinguish between successive instances of the same file name on the command line.

While you can change the value of `ARGIND` within your `awk` program, `gawk` automatically sets it to a new value when the next file is opened.

This variable is a `gawk` extension. In other `awk` implementations, or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), it is not special.

**ENVIRON** An associative array containing the values of the environment. The array indices are the environment variable names; the elements are the values of the particular environment variables. For example, `ENVIRON["HOME"]` might be `"/home/arnold"`. Changing this array does not affect the environment passed on to any programs that `awk` may spawn via redirection or the `system()` function.

Some operating systems may not have environment variables. On such systems, the `ENVIRON` array is empty (except for `ENVIRON["AWKPATH"]`, see [Section 2.5.1 \[The `AWKPATH` Environment Variable\]](#), page 32).

**ERRNO #** If a system error occurs during a redirection for `getline`, during a read for `getline`, or during a `close()` operation, then `ERRNO` contains a string describing the error.

In addition, `gawk` clears `ERRNO` before opening each command-line input file. This enables checking if the file is readable inside a `BEGINFILE` pattern (see [Section 7.1.5 \[The `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE` Special Patterns\]](#), page 115).

Otherwise, `ERRNO` works similarly to the C variable `errno`. Except for the case just mentioned, `gawk` *never* clears it (sets it to zero or `""`). Thus, you should only expect its value to be meaningful when an I/O operation returns a failure value, such as `getline` returning `-1`. You are, of course, free to clear it yourself before doing an I/O operation.

This variable is a `gawk` extension. In other `awk` implementations, or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), it is not special.

**FILENAME** The name of the file that `awk` is currently reading. When no data files are listed on the command line, `awk` reads from the standard input and `FILENAME`



is set to "-". FILENAME is changed each time a new file is read (see [Chapter 4 \[Reading Input Files\]](#), page 49). Inside a BEGIN rule, the value of FILENAME is "", since there are no input files being processed yet.<sup>3</sup> Note, though, that using `getline` (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with getline\]](#), page 67) inside a BEGIN rule can give FILENAME a value.

**FNR** The current record number in the current file. FNR is incremented each time a new record is read (see [Section 4.1 \[How Input Is Split into Records\]](#), page 49). It is reinitialized to zero each time a new input file is started.

**NF** The number of fields in the current input record. NF is set each time a new record is read, when a new field is created or when \$0 changes (see [Section 4.2 \[Examining Fields\]](#), page 52).

Unlike most of the variables described in this section, assigning a value to NF has the potential to affect `awk`'s internal workings. In particular, assignments to NF can be used to create or remove fields from the current record. See [Section 4.4 \[Changing the Contents of a Field\]](#), page 54.

**NR** The number of input records `awk` has processed since the beginning of the program's execution (see [Section 4.1 \[How Input Is Split into Records\]](#), page 49). NR is incremented each time a new record is read.

#### PROCINFO #

The elements of this array provide access to information about the running `awk` program. The following elements (listed alphabetically) are guaranteed to be available:

`PROCINFO["egid"]`  
The value of the `getegid()` system call.

`PROCINFO["euid"]`  
The value of the `geteuid()` system call.

`PROCINFO["FS"]`  
This is "FS" if field splitting with FS is in effect, "FIELDWIDTHS" if field splitting with FIELDWIDTHS is in effect, or "FPAT" if field matching with FPAT is in effect.

`PROCINFO["gid"]`  
The value of the `getgid()` system call.

`PROCINFO["pgrp"]`  
The process group ID of the current process.

`PROCINFO["pid"]`  
The process ID of the current process.

`PROCINFO["ppid"]`  
The parent process ID of the current process.

<sup>3</sup> Some early implementations of Unix `awk` initialized FILENAME to "-", even if there were data files to be processed. This behavior was incorrect and should not be relied upon in your programs.

`PROCINFO["sorted_in"]`

If this element exists in `PROCINFO`, its value controls the order in which array indices will be processed by `for (index in array) ...` loops. Since this is an advanced feature, we defer the full description until later; see [Section 8.1.5 \[Scanning All Elements of an Array\]](#), page 138.

`PROCINFO["strftime"]`

The default time format string for `strftime()`. Assigning a new value to this element changes the default. See [Section 9.1.5 \[Time Functions\]](#), page 163.

`PROCINFO["uid"]`

The value of the `getuid()` system call.

`PROCINFO["version"]`

The version of `gawk`.

On some systems, there may be elements in the array, `"group1"` through `"groupN"` for some  $N$ .  $N$  is the number of supplementary groups that the process has. Use the `in` operator to test for these elements (see [Section 8.1.2 \[Referring to an Array Element\]](#), page 136).

The `PROCINFO` array is also used to cause coprocesses to communicate over pseudo-ttys instead of through two-way pipes; this is discussed further in [Section 11.3 \[Two-Way Communications with Another Process\]](#), page 203.

This array is a `gawk` extension. In other `awk` implementations, or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), it is not special.

**RLENGTH** The length of the substring matched by the `match()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). `RLENGTH` is set by invoking the `match()` function. Its value is the length of the matched string, or `-1` if no match is found.

**RSTART** The start-index in characters of the substring that is matched by the `match()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). `RSTART` is set by invoking the `match()` function. Its value is the position of the string where the matched substring starts, or zero if no match was found.

**RT #** This is set each time a record is read. It contains the input text that matched the text denoted by `RS`, the record separator.

This variable is a `gawk` extension. In other `awk` implementations, or if `gawk` is in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), it is not special.

### Advanced Notes: Changing NR and FNR

`awk` increments `NR` and `FNR` each time it reads a record, instead of setting them to the absolute value of the number of records read. This means that a program can change these variables and their new values are incremented for each record. The following example shows this:



```

$ echo '1
> 2
> 3
> 4' | awk 'NR == 2 { NR = 17 }
> { print NR }'
+ 1
+ 17
+ 18
+ 19

```

Before FNR was added to the `awk` language (see [Section A.1 \[Major Changes Between V7 and SVR3.1\]](#), page 301), many `awk` programs used this feature to track the number of records in a file by resetting `NR` to zero when `FILENAME` changed.

### 7.5.3 Using ARGV and ARGV

[Section 7.5.2 \[Built-in Variables That Convey Information\]](#), page 129, presented the following program describing the information contained in `ARGC` and `ARGV`:

```

$ awk 'BEGIN {
>     for (i = 0; i < ARGC; i++)
>         print ARGV[i]
> }' inventory-shipped BBS-list
+ awk
+ inventory-shipped
+ BBS-list

```

In this example, `ARGV[0]` contains `awk`, `ARGV[1]` contains `inventory-shipped`, and `ARGV[2]` contains `BBS-list`. Notice that the `awk` program is not entered in `ARGV`. The other command-line options, with their arguments, are also not entered. This includes variable assignments done with the `-v` option (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25). Normal variable assignments on the command line *are* treated as arguments and do show up in the `ARGV` array. Given the following program in a file named `showargs.awk`:

```

BEGIN {
    printf "A=%d, B=%d\n", A, B
    for (i = 0; i < ARGC; i++)
        printf "\tARGV[%d] = %s\n", i, ARGV[i]
}
END { printf "A=%d, B=%d\n", A, B }

```

Running it produces the following:

```

$ awk -v A=1 -f showargs.awk B=2 /dev/null
+ A=1, B=0
+     ARGV[0] = awk
+     ARGV[1] = B=2
+     ARGV[2] = /dev/null
+ A=1, B=2

```

A program can alter `ARGC` and the elements of `ARGV`. Each time `awk` reaches the end of an input file, it uses the next element of `ARGV` as the name of the next input file. By storing a different string there, a program can change which files are read. Use `"-"` to represent

the standard input. Storing additional elements and incrementing `ARGC` causes additional files to be read.

If the value of `ARGC` is decreased, that eliminates input files from the end of the list. By recording the old value of `ARGC` elsewhere, a program can treat the eliminated arguments as something other than file names.

To eliminate a file from the middle of the list, store the null string (`""`) into `ARGV` in place of the file's name. As a special feature, `awk` ignores file names that have been replaced with the null string. Another option is to use the `delete` statement to remove elements from `ARGV` (see [Section 8.2 \[The delete Statement\]](#), page 139).

All of these actions are typically done in the `BEGIN` rule, before actual processing of the input begins. See [Section 13.2.4 \[Splitting a Large File into Pieces\]](#), page 252, and see [Section 13.2.5 \[Duplicating Output into Multiple Files\]](#), page 254, for examples of each way of removing elements from `ARGV`. The following fragment processes `ARGV` in order to examine, and then remove, command-line options:

```
BEGIN {
    for (i = 1; i < ARGC; i++) {
        if (ARGV[i] == "-v")
            verbose = 1
        else if (ARGV[i] == "-q")
            debug = 1
        else if (ARGV[i] ~ /^-./) {
            e = sprintf("%s: unrecognized option -- %c",
                ARGV[0], substr(ARGV[i], 2, 1))
            print e > "/dev/stderr"
        } else
            break
        delete ARGV[i]
    }
}
```

To actually get the options into the `awk` program, end the `awk` options with `--` and then supply the `awk` program's options, in the following manner:

```
awk -f myprog -- -v -q file1 file2 ...
```

This is not necessary in `gawk`. Unless `--posix` has been specified, `gawk` silently puts any unrecognized options into `ARGV` for the `awk` program to deal with. As soon as it sees an unknown option, `gawk` stops looking for other options that it might otherwise recognize. The previous example with `gawk` would be:

```
gawk -f myprog -q -v file1 file2 ...
```

Because `-q` is not a valid `gawk` option, it and the following `-v` are passed on to the `awk` program. (See [Section 12.4 \[Processing Command-Line Options\]](#), page 225, for an `awk` library function that parses command-line options.)

## 8 Arrays in awk

An *array* is a table of values called *elements*. The elements of an array are distinguished by their *indices*. Indices may be either numbers or strings.

This chapter describes how arrays work in **awk**, how to use array elements, how to scan through every element in an array, and how to remove array elements. It also describes how **awk** simulates multidimensional arrays, as well as some of the less obvious points about array usage. The chapter moves on to discuss **gawk**'s facility for sorting arrays, and ends with a brief description of **gawk**'s ability to support true multidimensional arrays.

**awk** maintains a single set of names that may be used for naming variables, arrays, and functions (see [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170). Thus, you cannot have a variable and an array with the same name in the same **awk** program.

### 8.1 The Basics of Arrays

This section presents the basics: working with elements in arrays one at a time, and traversing all of the elements in an array.

#### 8.1.1 Introduction to Arrays

*Doing linear scans over an associative array is like trying to club someone to death with a loaded Uzi.*

Larry Wall

The **awk** language provides one-dimensional arrays for storing groups of related strings or numbers. Every **awk** array must have a name. Array names have the same syntax as variable names; any valid variable name would also be a valid array name. But one name cannot be used in both ways (as an array and as a variable) in the same **awk** program.

Arrays in **awk** superficially resemble arrays in other programming languages, but there are fundamental differences. In **awk**, it isn't necessary to specify the size of an array before starting to use it. Additionally, any number or string in **awk**, not just consecutive integers, may be used as an array index.

In most other languages, arrays must be *declared* before use, including a specification of how many elements or components they contain. In such languages, the declaration causes a contiguous block of memory to be allocated for that many elements. Usually, an index in the array must be a positive integer. For example, the index zero specifies the first element in the array, which is actually stored at the beginning of the block of memory. Index one specifies the second element, which is stored in memory right after the first element, and so on. It is impossible to add more elements to the array, because it has room only for as many elements as given in the declaration. (Some languages allow arbitrary starting and ending indices—e.g., '15 .. 27'—but the size of the array is still fixed when the array is declared.)

A contiguous array of four elements might look like the following example, conceptually, if the element values are 8, "foo", "", and 30:

8	"foo"	"	30	Value
0	1	2	3	Index

Only the values are stored; the indices are implicit from the order of the values. Here, 8 is the value at index zero, because 8 appears in the position with zero elements before it.

Arrays in `awk` are different—they are *associative*. This means that each array is a collection of pairs: an index and its corresponding array element value:

```
Index 3    Value 30
Index 1    Value "foo"
Index 0    Value 8
Index 2    Value ""
```

The pairs are shown in jumbled order because their order is irrelevant.

One advantage of associative arrays is that new pairs can be added at any time. For example, suppose a tenth element is added to the array whose value is `"number ten"`. The result is:

```
Index 10   Value "number ten"
Index 3    Value 30
Index 1    Value "foo"
Index 0    Value 8
Index 2    Value ""
```

Now the array is *sparse*, which just means some indices are missing. It has elements 0–3 and 10, but doesn't have elements 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9.

Another consequence of associative arrays is that the indices don't have to be positive integers. Any number, or even a string, can be an index. For example, the following is an array that translates words from English to French:

```
Index "dog" Value "chien"
Index "cat" Value "chat"
Index "one" Value "un"
Index 1    Value "un"
```

Here we decided to translate the number one in both spelled-out and numeric form—thus illustrating that a single array can have both numbers and strings as indices. In fact, array subscripts are always strings; this is discussed in more detail in [Section 8.3 \[Using Numbers to Subscript Arrays\]](#), page 140. Here, the number 1 isn't double-quoted, since `awk` automatically converts it to a string.

The value of `IGNORECASE` has no effect upon array subscripting. The identical string value used to store an array element must be used to retrieve it. When `awk` creates an array (e.g., with the `split()` built-in function), that array's indices are consecutive integers starting at one. (See [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149.)

`awk`'s arrays are efficient—the time to access an element is independent of the number of elements in the array.

### 8.1.2 Referring to an Array Element

The principal way to use an array is to refer to one of its elements. An array reference is an expression as follows:

```
array[index-expression]
```

Here, `array` is the name of an array. The expression `index-expression` is the index of the desired element of the array.

The value of the array reference is the current value of that array element. For example, `foo[4.3]` is an expression for the element of array `foo` at index '4.3'.

A reference to an array element that has no recorded value yields a value of "", the null string. This includes elements that have not been assigned any value as well as elements that have been deleted (see [Section 8.2 \[The delete Statement\]](#), page 139).

**NOTE:** A reference to an element that does not exist *automatically* creates that array element, with the null string as its value. (In some cases, this is unfortunate, because it might waste memory inside `awk`.)

Novice `awk` programmers often make the mistake of checking if an element exists by checking if the value is empty:

```
# Check if "foo" exists in a:          Incorrect!
if (a["foo"] != "") ...
```

This is incorrect, since this will *create* `a["foo"]` if it didn't exist before!

To determine whether an element exists in an array at a certain index, use the following expression:

```
ind in array
```

This expression tests whether the particular index *ind* exists, without the side effect of creating that element if it is not present. The expression has the value one (true) if `array[ind]` exists and zero (false) if it does not exist. For example, this statement tests whether the array `frequencies` contains the index '2':

```
if (2 in frequencies)
    print "Subscript 2 is present."
```

Note that this is *not* a test of whether the array `frequencies` contains an element whose *value* is two. There is no way to do that except to scan all the elements. Also, this *does not* create `frequencies[2]`, while the following (incorrect) alternative does:

```
if (frequencies[2] != "")
    print "Subscript 2 is present."
```

### 8.1.3 Assigning Array Elements

Array elements can be assigned values just like `awk` variables:

```
array[index-expression] = value
```

*array* is the name of an array. The expression *index-expression* is the index of the element of the array that is assigned a value. The expression *value* is the value to assign to that element of the array.

### 8.1.4 Basic Array Example

The following program takes a list of lines, each beginning with a line number, and prints them out in order of line number. The line numbers are not in order when they are first read—instead they are scrambled. This program sorts the lines by making an array using the line numbers as subscripts. The program then prints out the lines in sorted order of their numbers. It is a very simple program and gets confused upon encountering repeated numbers, gaps, or lines that don't begin with a number:

```

{
    if ($1 > max)
        max = $1
    arr[$1] = $0
}

END {
    for (x = 1; x <= max; x++)
        print arr[x]
}

```

The first rule keeps track of the largest line number seen so far; it also stores each line into the array `arr`, at an index that is the line's number. The second rule runs after all the input has been read, to print out all the lines. When this program is run with the following input:

```

5 I am the Five man
2 Who are you? The new number two!
4 . . . And four on the floor
1 Who is number one?
3 I three you.

```

Its output is:

```

1 Who is number one?
2 Who are you? The new number two!
3 I three you.
4 . . . And four on the floor
5 I am the Five man

```

If a line number is repeated, the last line with a given number overrides the others. Gaps in the line numbers can be handled with an easy improvement to the program's `END` rule, as follows:

```

END {
    for (x = 1; x <= max; x++)
        if (x in arr)
            print arr[x]
}

```

### 8.1.5 Scanning All Elements of an Array

In programs that use arrays, it is often necessary to use a loop that executes once for each element of an array. In other languages, where arrays are contiguous and indices are limited to positive integers, this is easy: all the valid indices can be found by counting from the lowest index up to the highest. This technique won't do the job in `awk`, because any number or string can be an array index. So `awk` has a special kind of `for` statement for scanning an array:

```

for (var in array)
    body

```

This loop executes `body` once for each index in `array` that the program has previously used, with the variable `var` set to that index.

The following program uses this form of the `for` statement. The first rule scans the input records and notes which words appear (at least once) in the input, by storing a one into the array `used` with the word as index. The second rule scans the elements of `used` to find all the distinct words that appear in the input. It prints each word that is more than 10 characters long and also prints the number of such words. See [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149, for more information on the built-in function `length()`.

```
# Record a 1 for each word that is used at least once
{
    for (i = 1; i <= NF; i++)
        used[$i] = 1
}

# Find number of distinct words more than 10 characters long
END {
    for (x in used) {
        if (length(x) > 10) {
            ++num_long_words
            print x
        }
    }
    print num_long_words, "words longer than 10 characters"
}
```

See [Section 13.3.5 \[Generating Word-Usage Counts\]](#), page 269, for a more detailed example of this type.

The order in which elements of the array are accessed by this statement is determined by the internal arrangement of the array elements within `awk` and normally cannot be controlled or changed. This can lead to problems if new elements are added to `array` by statements in the loop body; it is not predictable whether the `for` loop will reach them. Similarly, changing `var` inside the loop may produce strange results. It is best to avoid such things.

As an extension, `gawk` makes it possible for you to loop over the elements of an array in order, based on the value of `PROCINFO["sorted_in"]` (see [Section 7.5.2 \[Built-in Variables That Convey Information\]](#), page 129). This is an advanced feature, so discussion of it is delayed until [Section 11.2.1 \[Controlling Array Traversal\]](#), page 196.

In addition, `gawk` provides built-in functions for sorting arrays; see [Section 11.2.2 \[Sorting Array Values and Indices with `gawk`\]](#), page 202.

## 8.2 The delete Statement

To remove an individual element of an array, use the `delete` statement:

```
delete array[index-expression]
```

Once an array element has been deleted, any value the element once had is no longer available. It is as if the element had never been referred to or been given a value. The following is an example of deleting elements in an array:

```
for (i in frequencies)
    delete frequencies[i]
```

This example removes all the elements from the array `frequencies`. Once an element is deleted, a subsequent `for` statement to scan the array does not report that element and the `in` operator to check for the presence of that element returns zero (i.e., false):

```
delete foo[4]
if (4 in foo)
    print "This will never be printed"
```

It is important to note that deleting an element is *not* the same as assigning it a null value (the empty string, ""). For example:

```
foo[4] = ""
if (4 in foo)
    print "This is printed, even though foo[4] is empty"
```

It is not an error to delete an element that does not exist. However, if `--lint` is provided on the command line (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\], page 25](#)), `gawk` issues a warning message when an element that is not in the array is deleted.

All the elements of an array may be deleted with a single statement (c.e.) by leaving off the subscript in the `delete` statement, as follows:

```
delete array
```

This ability is a `gawk` extension; it is not available in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\], page 25](#)).

Using this version of the `delete` statement is about three times more efficient than the equivalent loop that deletes each element one at a time.

The following statement provides a portable but nonobvious way to clear out an array:<sup>1</sup>

```
split("", array)
```

The `split()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\], page 149](#)) clears out the target array first. This call asks it to split apart the null string. Because there is no data to split out, the function simply clears the array and then returns.

**CAUTION:** Deleting an array does not change its type; you cannot delete an array and then use the array's name as a scalar (i.e., a regular variable). For example, the following does not work:

```
a[1] = 3
delete a
a = 3
```

## 8.3 Using Numbers to Subscript Arrays

An important aspect to remember about arrays is that *array subscripts are always strings*. When a numeric value is used as a subscript, it is converted to a string value before being used for subscripting (see [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\], page 93](#)). This means that the value of the built-in variable `CONVFMT` can affect how your program accesses elements of an array. For example:

---

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Michael Brennan for pointing this out.

```

xyz = 12.153
data[xyz] = 1
CONVFMT = "%2.2f"
if (xyz in data)
    printf "%s is in data\n", xyz
else
    printf "%s is not in data\n", xyz

```

This prints ‘12.15 is not in data’. The first statement gives `xyz` a numeric value. Assigning to `data[xyz]` subscript `data` with the string value “12.153” (using the default conversion value of `CONVFMT`, “%.6g”). Thus, the array element `data["12.153"]` is assigned the value one. The program then changes the value of `CONVFMT`. The test ‘(`xyz in data`)’ generates a new string value from `xyz`—this time “12.15”—because the value of `CONVFMT` only allows two significant digits. This test fails, since “12.15” is different from “12.153”.

According to the rules for conversions (see [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\]](#), page 93), integer values are always converted to strings as integers, no matter what the value of `CONVFMT` may happen to be. So the usual case of the following works:

```

for (i = 1; i <= maxsub; i++)
    do something with array[i]

```

The “integer values always convert to strings as integers” rule has an additional consequence for array indexing. Octal and hexadecimal constants (see [Section 6.1.1.2 \[Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers\]](#), page 89) are converted internally into numbers, and their original form is forgotten. This means, for example, that `array[17]`, `array[021]`, and `array[0x11]` all refer to the same element!

As with many things in `awk`, the majority of the time things work as one would expect them to. But it is useful to have a precise knowledge of the actual rules since they can sometimes have a subtle effect on your programs.

## 8.4 Using Uninitialized Variables as Subscripts

Suppose it’s necessary to write a program to print the input data in reverse order. A reasonable attempt to do so (with some test data) might look like this:

```

$ echo 'line 1
> line 2
> line 3' | awk '{ l[lines] = $0; ++lines }
> END {
>     for (i = lines-1; i >= 0; --i)
>         print l[i]
> }'
└ line 3
└ line 2

```

Unfortunately, the very first line of input data did not come out in the output!

Upon first glance, we would think that this program should have worked. The variable `lines` is uninitialized, and uninitialized variables have the numeric value zero. So, `awk` should have printed the value of `l[0]`.

The issue here is that subscripts for `awk` arrays are *always* strings. Uninitialized variables, when used as strings, have the value "", not zero. Thus, 'line 1' ends up stored in `l[""]`. The following version of the program works correctly:

```
{ l[lines++] = $0 }
END {
    for (i = lines - 1; i >= 0; --i)
        print l[i]
}
```

Here, the '++' forces `lines` to be numeric, thus making the "old value" numeric zero. This is then converted to "0" as the array subscript.



Even though it is somewhat unusual, the null string ("") is a valid array subscript. `gawk` warns about the use of the null string as a subscript if '--lint' is provided on the command line (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

## 8.5 Multidimensional Arrays

A multidimensional array is an array in which an element is identified by a sequence of indices instead of a single index. For example, a two-dimensional array requires two indices. The usual way (in most languages, including `awk`) to refer to an element of a two-dimensional array named `grid` is with `grid[x,y]`.

Multidimensional arrays are supported in `awk` through concatenation of indices into one string. `awk` converts the indices into strings (see [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\]](#), page 93) and concatenates them together, with a separator between them. This creates a single string that describes the values of the separate indices. The combined string is used as a single index into an ordinary, one-dimensional array. The separator used is the value of the built-in variable `SUBSEP`.

For example, suppose we evaluate the expression `foo[5,12] = "value"` when the value of `SUBSEP` is "@". The numbers 5 and 12 are converted to strings and concatenated with an '@' between them, yielding "5@12"; thus, the array element `foo["5@12"]` is set to "value".

Once the element's value is stored, `awk` has no record of whether it was stored with a single index or a sequence of indices. The two expressions `foo[5,12]` and `foo[5 SUBSEP 12]` are always equivalent.

The default value of `SUBSEP` is the string "\034", which contains a nonprinting character that is unlikely to appear in an `awk` program or in most input data. The usefulness of choosing an unlikely character comes from the fact that index values that contain a string matching `SUBSEP` can lead to combined strings that are ambiguous. Suppose that `SUBSEP` is "@"; then `foo["a@b", "c"]` and `foo["a", "b@c"]` are indistinguishable because both are actually stored as `foo["a@b@c"]`.

To test whether a particular index sequence exists in a multidimensional array, use the same operator (`in`) that is used for single dimensional arrays. Write the whole sequence of indices in parentheses, separated by commas, as the left operand:

```
(subscript1, subscript2, ...) in array
```

The following example treats its input as a two-dimensional array of fields; it rotates this array 90 degrees clockwise and prints the result. It assumes that all lines have the same number of elements:

```

{
    if (max_nf < NF)
        max_nf = NF
    max_nr = NR
    for (x = 1; x <= NF; x++)
        vector[x, NR] = $x
}

END {
    for (x = 1; x <= max_nf; x++) {
        for (y = max_nr; y >= 1; --y)
            printf("%s ", vector[x, y])
        printf("\n")
    }
}

```

When given the input:

```

1 2 3 4 5 6
2 3 4 5 6 1
3 4 5 6 1 2
4 5 6 1 2 3

```

the program produces the following output:

```

4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2
6 5 4 3
1 6 5 4
2 1 6 5
3 2 1 6

```

### 8.5.1 Scanning Multidimensional Arrays

There is no special `for` statement for scanning a “multidimensional” array. There cannot be one, because, in truth, there are no multidimensional arrays or elements—there is only a multidimensional *way of accessing* an array.

However, if your program has an array that is always accessed as multidimensional, you can get the effect of scanning it by combining the scanning `for` statement (see [Section 8.1.5 \[Scanning All Elements of an Array\]](#), page 138) with the built-in `split()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). It works in the following manner:

```

for (combined in array) {
    split(combined, separate, SUBSEP)
    ...
}

```

This sets the variable `combined` to each concatenated combined index in the array, and splits it into the individual indices by breaking it apart where the value of `SUBSEP` appears. The individual indices then become the elements of the array `separate`.

Thus, if a value is previously stored in `array[1, "foo"]`; then an element with index `"1\034foo"` exists in `array`. (Recall that the default value of `SUBSEP` is the character with

code 034.) Sooner or later, the `for` statement finds that index and does an iteration with the variable combined set to `"1\034foo"`. Then the `split()` function is called as follows:

```
split("1\034foo", separate, "\034")
```

The result is to set `separate[1]` to `"1"` and `separate[2]` to `"foo"`. Presto! The original sequence of separate indices is recovered.

## 8.6 Arrays of Arrays

`gawk` supports arrays of arrays. Elements of a subarray are referred to by their own indices enclosed in square brackets, just like the elements of the main array. For example, the following creates a two-element subarray at index `'1'` of the main array `a`:

```
a[1][1] = 1
a[1][2] = 2
```

This simulates a true two-dimensional array. Each subarray element can contain another subarray as a value, which in turn can hold other arrays as well. In this way, you can create arrays of three or more dimensions. The indices can be any `awk` expression, including scalars separated by commas (that is, a regular `awk` simulated multidimensional subscript). So the following is valid in `gawk`:

```
a[1][3][1, "name"] = "barney"
```

Each subarray and the main array can be of different length. In fact, the elements of an array or its subarray do not all have to have the same type. This means that the main array and any of its subarrays can be non-rectangular, or jagged in structure. One can assign a scalar value to the index `'4'` of the main array `a`:

```
a[4] = "An element in a jagged array"
```

The terms *dimension*, *row* and *column* are meaningless when applied to such an array, but we will use “dimension” henceforth to imply the maximum number of indices needed to refer to an existing element. The type of any element that has already been assigned cannot be changed by assigning a value of a different type. You have to first delete the current element, which effectively makes `gawk` forget about the element at that index:

```
delete a[4]
a[4][5][6][7] = "An element in a four-dimensional array"
```

This removes the scalar value from index `'4'` and then inserts a subarray of subarray of subarray containing a scalar. You can also delete an entire subarray or subarray of subarrays:

```
delete a[4][5]
a[4][5] = "An element in subarray a[4]"
```

But recall that you can not delete the main array `a` and then use it as a scalar.

The built-in functions which take array arguments can also be used with subarrays. For example, the following code fragment uses `length()` (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149) to determine the number of elements in the main array `a` and its subarrays:

```
print length(a), length(a[1]), length(a[1][3])
```

This results in the following output for our main array `a`:

2, 3, 1

The `'subscript in array'` expression (see [Section 8.1.2 \[Referring to an Array Element\]](#), [page 136](#)) works similarly for both regular awk-style arrays and arrays of arrays. For example, the tests `'1 in a'`, `'3 in a[1]'`, and `'(1, "name") in a[1][3]'` all evaluate to one (true) for our array `a`.

The `'for (item in array)'` statement (see [Section 8.1.5 \[Scanning All Elements of an Array\]](#), [page 138](#)) can be nested to scan all the elements of an array of arrays if it is rectangular in structure. In order to print the contents (scalar values) of a two-dimensional array of arrays (i.e., in which each first-level element is itself an array, not necessarily of the same length) you could use the following code:

```
for (i in array)
  for (j in array[i])
    print array[i][j]
```

The `isarray()` function (see [Section 9.1.7 \[Getting Type Information\]](#), [page 170](#)) lets you test if an array element is itself an array:

```
for (i in array) {
  if (isarray(array[i])) {
    for (j in array[i]) {
      print array[i][j]
    }
  }
}
```

If the structure of a jagged array of arrays is known in advance, you can often devise workarounds using control statements. For example, the following code prints the elements of our main array `a`:

```
for (i in a) {
  for (j in a[i]) {
    if (j == 3) {
      for (k in a[i][j])
        print a[i][j][k]
    } else
      print a[i][j]
  }
}
```

See [Section 12.7 \[Traversing Arrays of Arrays\]](#), [page 238](#), for a user-defined function that will “walk” an arbitrarily-dimensioned array of arrays.

Recall that a reference to an uninitialized array element yields a value of `""`, the null string. This has one important implication when you intend to use a subarray as an argument to a function, as illustrated by the following example:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { split("a b c d", b[1]); print b[1][1] }'
[error] gawk: cmd. line:1: fatal: split: second argument is not an array
```

The way to work around this is to first force `b[1]` to be an array by creating an arbitrary index:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { b[1][1] = ""; split("a b c d", b[1]); print b[1][1] }'
+ a
```



## 9 Functions

This chapter describes `awk`'s built-in functions, which fall into three categories: numeric, string, and I/O. `gawk` provides additional groups of functions to work with values that represent time, do bit manipulation, sort arrays, and internationalize and localize programs.

Besides the built-in functions, `awk` has provisions for writing new functions that the rest of a program can use. The second half of this chapter describes these *user-defined* functions.

### 9.1 Built-in Functions

*Built-in* functions are always available for your `awk` program to call. This section defines all the built-in functions in `awk`; some of these are mentioned in other sections but are summarized here for your convenience.

#### 9.1.1 Calling Built-in Functions

To call one of `awk`'s built-in functions, write the name of the function followed by arguments in parentheses. For example, `'atan2(y + z, 1)'` is a call to the function `atan2()` and has two arguments.

Whitespace is ignored between the built-in function name and the open parenthesis, but nonetheless it is good practice to avoid using whitespace there. User-defined functions do not permit whitespace in this way, and it is easier to avoid mistakes by following a simple convention that always works—no whitespace after a function name.

Each built-in function accepts a certain number of arguments. In some cases, arguments can be omitted. The defaults for omitted arguments vary from function to function and are described under the individual functions. In some `awk` implementations, extra arguments given to built-in functions are ignored. However, in `gawk`, it is a fatal error to give extra arguments to a built-in function.

When a function is called, expressions that create the function's actual parameters are evaluated completely before the call is performed. For example, in the following code fragment:

```
i = 4
j = sqrt(i++)
```

the variable `i` is incremented to the value five before `sqrt()` is called with a value of four for its actual parameter. The order of evaluation of the expressions used for the function's parameters is undefined. Thus, avoid writing programs that assume that parameters are evaluated from left to right or from right to left. For example:

```
i = 5
j = atan2(i++, i *= 2)
```

If the order of evaluation is left to right, then `i` first becomes 6, and then 12, and `atan2()` is called with the two arguments 6 and 12. But if the order of evaluation is right to left, `i` first becomes 10, then 11, and `atan2()` is called with the two arguments 11 and 10.

#### 9.1.2 Numeric Functions

The following list describes all of the built-in functions that work with numbers. Optional parameters are enclosed in square brackets ([ ]):

- `atan2(y, x)` Return the arctangent of  $y / x$  in radians.
- `cos(x)` Return the cosine of  $x$ , with  $x$  in radians.
- `exp(x)` Return the exponential of  $x$  ( $e^x$ ) or report an error if  $x$  is out of range. The range of values  $x$  can have depends on your machine's floating-point representation.
- `int(x)` Return the nearest integer to  $x$ , located between  $x$  and zero and truncated toward zero.  
For example, `int(3)` is 3, `int(3.9)` is 3, `int(-3.9)` is -3, and `int(-3)` is -3 as well.
- `log(x)` Return the natural logarithm of  $x$ , if  $x$  is positive; otherwise, report an error.
- `rand()` Return a random number. The values of `rand()` are uniformly distributed between zero and one. The value could be zero but is never one.<sup>1</sup>  
Often random integers are needed instead. Following is a user-defined function that can be used to obtain a random non-negative integer less than  $n$ :

```
function randint(n) {
    return int(n * rand())
}
```

The multiplication produces a random number greater than zero and less than  $n$ . Using `int()`, this result is made into an integer between zero and  $n - 1$ , inclusive.

The following example uses a similar function to produce random integers between one and  $n$ . This program prints a new random number for each input record:

```
# Function to roll a simulated die.
function roll(n) { return 1 + int(rand() * n) }

# Roll 3 six-sided dice and
# print total number of points.
{
    printf("%d points\n",
        roll(6)+roll(6)+roll(6))
}
```

**CAUTION:** In most `awk` implementations, including `gawk`, `rand()` starts generating numbers from the same starting number, or *seed*, each time you run `awk`.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a program generates the same results each time you run it. The numbers are random within one `awk` run but predictable from run to run. This is convenient for debugging,

<sup>1</sup> The C version of `rand()` on many Unix systems is known to produce fairly poor sequences of random numbers. However, nothing requires that an `awk` implementation use the C `rand()` to implement the `awk` version of `rand()`. In fact, `gawk` uses the BSD `random()` function, which is considerably better than `rand()`, to produce random numbers.

<sup>2</sup> `mawk` uses a different seed each time.

but if you want a program to do different things each time it is used, you must change the seed to a value that is different in each run. To do this, use `srand()`.

`sin(x)` Return the sine of *x*, with *x* in radians.

`sqrt(x)` Return the positive square root of *x*. `gawk` prints a warning message if *x* is negative. Thus, `sqrt(4)` is 2.

`srand([x])` Set the starting point, or seed, for generating random numbers to the value *x*. Each seed value leads to a particular sequence of random numbers.<sup>3</sup> Thus, if the seed is set to the same value a second time, the same sequence of random numbers is produced again.

**CAUTION:** Different `awk` implementations use different random-number generators internally. Don't expect the same `awk` program to produce the same series of random numbers when executed by different versions of `awk`.

If the argument *x* is omitted, as in '`srand()`', then the current date and time of day are used for a seed. This is the way to get random numbers that are truly unpredictable.

The return value of `srand()` is the previous seed. This makes it easy to keep track of the seeds in case you need to consistently reproduce sequences of random numbers.

### 9.1.3 String-Manipulation Functions

The functions in this section look at or change the text of one or more strings. `gawk` understands locales (see [Section 6.6 \[Where You Are Makes A Difference\]](#), page 110), and does all string processing in terms of *characters*, not *bytes*. This distinction is particularly important to understand for locales where one character may be represented by multiple bytes. Thus, for example, `length()` returns the number of characters in a string, and not the number of bytes used to represent those characters. Similarly, `index()` works with character indices, and not byte indices.

In the following list, optional parameters are enclosed in square brackets ([ ]). Several functions perform string substitution; the full discussion is provided in the description of the `sub()` function, which comes towards the end since the list is presented in alphabetic order. Those functions that are specific to `gawk` are marked with a pound sign ('#'):

`asort(source [, dest [, how ]]) #`

Return the number of elements in the array *source*. `gawk` sorts the contents of *source* and replaces the indices of the sorted values of *source* with sequential integers starting with one. If the optional array *dest* is specified, then *source* is duplicated into *dest*. *dest* is then sorted, leaving the indices of *source* unchanged. The optional third argument *how* is a string which controls the

<sup>3</sup> Computer-generated random numbers really are not truly random. They are technically known as "pseudorandom." This means that while the numbers in a sequence appear to be random, you can in fact generate the same sequence of random numbers over and over again.

rule for comparing values, and the sort direction. A single space is required between the comparison mode, ‘string’ or ‘number’, and the direction specification, ‘ascending’ or ‘descending’. You can omit direction and/or mode in which case it will default to ‘ascending’ and ‘string’, respectively. An empty string "" is the same as the default "ascending string" for the value of *how*. If the ‘source’ array contains subarrays as values, they will come out last(first) in the ‘dest’ array for ‘ascending’(‘descending’) order specification. The value of IGNORECASE affects the sorting. The third argument can also be a user-defined function name in which case the value returned by the function is used to order the array elements before constructing the result array. See [Section 11.2.2 \[Sorting Array Values and Indices with gawk\]](#), page 202, for more information.

For example, if the contents of *a* are as follows:

```
a["last"] = "de"
a["first"] = "sac"
a["middle"] = "cul"
```

A call to `asort()`:

```
asort(a)
```

results in the following contents of *a*:

```
a[1] = "cul"
a[2] = "de"
a[3] = "sac"
```

In order to reverse the direction of the sorted results in the above example, `asort()` can be called with three arguments as follows:

```
asort(a, a, "descending")
```

The `asort()` function is described in more detail in [Section 11.2.2 \[Sorting Array Values and Indices with gawk\]](#), page 202. `asort()` is a *gawk* extension; it is not available in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

```
asorti(source [, dest [, how ]]) #
```

Return the number of elements in the array *source*. It works similarly to `asort()`, however, the *indices* are sorted, instead of the values. (Here too, IGNORECASE affects the sorting.)

The `asorti()` function is described in more detail in [Section 11.2.2 \[Sorting Array Values and Indices with gawk\]](#), page 202. `asorti()` is a *gawk* extension; it is not available in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

```
gensub(regex, replacement, how [, target]) #
```

Search the target string *target* for matches of the regular expression *regex*. If *how* is a string beginning with ‘g’ or ‘G’ (short for “global”), then replace all matches of *regex* with *replacement*. Otherwise, *how* is treated as a number indicating which match of *regex* to replace. If no *target* is supplied, use \$0. It returns the modified string as the result of the function and the original target string is *not* changed.

`gensub()` is a general substitution function. Its purpose is to provide more features than the standard `sub()` and `gsub()` functions.

`gensub()` provides an additional feature that is not available in `sub()` or `gsub()`: the ability to specify components of a regexp in the replacement text. This is done by using parentheses in the regexp to mark the components and then specifying ‘\N’ in the replacement text, where N is a digit from 1 to 9. For example:

```
$ gawk '
> BEGIN {
>     a = "abc def"
>     b = gensub(/(.+) (.+)/, "\\2 \\1", "g", a)
>     print b
> }'
└─ def abc
```

As with `sub()`, you must type two backslashes in order to get one into the string. In the replacement text, the sequence ‘\0’ represents the entire matched text, as does the character ‘&’.

The following example shows how you can use the third argument to control which match of the regexp should be changed:

```
$ echo a b c a b c |
> gawk '{ print gensub(/a/, "AA", 2) }'
└─ a b c AA b c
```

In this case, `$0` is the default target string. `gensub()` returns the new string as its result, which is passed directly to `print` for printing.

If the *how* argument is a string that does not begin with ‘g’ or ‘G’, or if it is a number that is less than or equal to zero, only one substitution is performed. If *how* is zero, `gawk` issues a warning message.

If *regexp* does not match *target*, `gensub()`’s return value is the original unchanged value of *target*.

`gensub()` is a `gawk` extension; it is not available in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\], page 25](#)).

`gsub(regexp, replacement [, target])`

Search *target* for *all* of the longest, leftmost, *nonoverlapping* matching substrings it can find and replace them with *replacement*. The ‘g’ in `gsub()` stands for “global,” which means replace everywhere. For example:

```
{ gsub(/Britain/, "United Kingdom"); print }
```

replaces all occurrences of the string ‘Britain’ with ‘United Kingdom’ for all input records.

The `gsub()` function returns the number of substitutions made. If the variable to search and alter (*target*) is omitted, then the entire input record (`$0`) is used. As in `sub()`, the characters ‘&’ and ‘\’ are special, and the third argument must be assignable.

`index(in, find)`

Search the string *in* for the first occurrence of the string *find*, and return the position in characters where that occurrence begins in the string *in*. Consider the following example:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN { print index("peanut", "an") }'
+ 3
```

If *find* is not found, `index()` returns zero. (Remember that string indices in `awk` start at one.)

`length([string])`

Return the number of characters in *string*. If *string* is a number, the length of the digit string representing that number is returned. For example, `length("abcde")` is five. By contrast, `length(15 * 35)` works out to three. In this example,  $15 * 35 = 525$ , and 525 is then converted to the string "525", which has three characters.

If no argument is supplied, `length()` returns the length of `$0`.

**NOTE:** In older versions of `awk`, the `length()` function could be called without any parentheses. Doing so is considered poor practice, although the 2008 POSIX standard explicitly allows it, to support historical practice. For programs to be maximally portable, always supply the parentheses.

If `length()` is called with a variable that has not been used, `gawk` forces the variable to be a scalar. Other implementations of `awk` leave the variable without a type. Consider:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { print length(x) ; x[1] = 1 }'
+ 0
[error] gawk: fatal: attempt to use scalar 'x' as array
```

```
$ nawk 'BEGIN { print length(x) ; x[1] = 1 }'
+ 0
```

If `--lint` has been specified on the command line, `gawk` issues a warning about this.

With `gawk` and several other `awk` implementations, when given an array argument, the `length()` function returns the number of elements in the array. (c.e.) This is less useful than it might seem at first, as the array is not guaranteed to be indexed from one to the number of elements in it. If `--lint` is provided on the command line (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\], page 25](#)), `gawk` warns that passing an array argument is not portable. If `--posix` is supplied, using an array argument is a fatal error (see [Chapter 8 \[Arrays in awk\], page 135](#)).

`match(string, regexp [, array])`

Search *string* for the longest, leftmost substring matched by the regular expression, *regexp* and return the character position, or *index*, at which that substring begins (one, if it starts at the beginning of *string*). If no match is found, return zero.



The *regexp* argument may be either a regexp constant (*/.../*) or a string constant ("*...*"). In the latter case, the string is treated as a regexp to be matched. See [Section 3.8 \[Using Dynamic Regexp\], page 47](#), for a discussion of the difference between the two forms, and the implications for writing your program correctly.

The order of the first two arguments is backwards from most other string functions that work with regular expressions, such as `sub()` and `gsub()`. It might help to remember that for `match()`, the order is the same as for the `'~'` operator: '*string ~ regexp*'.

The `match()` function sets the built-in variable `RSTART` to the index. It also sets the built-in variable `RLENGTH` to the length in characters of the matched substring. If no match is found, `RSTART` is set to zero, and `RLENGTH` to `-1`.

For example:

```
{
    if ($1 == "FIND")
        regex = $2
    else {
        where = match($0, regex)
        if (where != 0)
            print "Match of", regex, "found at",
                where, "in", $0
    }
}
```

This program looks for lines that match the regular expression stored in the variable `regex`. This regular expression can be changed. If the first word on a line is `'FIND'`, `regex` is changed to be the second word on that line. Therefore, if given:

```
FIND ru+n
My program runs
but not very quickly
FIND Melvin
JF+KM
This line is property of Reality Engineering Co.
Melvin was here.
```

`awk` prints:

```
Match of ru+n found at 12 in My program runs
Match of Melvin found at 1 in Melvin was here.
```

If `array` is present, it is cleared, and then the zeroth element of `array` is set to the entire portion of *string* matched by *regexp*. If *regexp* contains parentheses, the integer-indexed elements of `array` are set to contain the portion of *string* matching the corresponding parenthesized subexpression. For example:

```
$ echo fo00obazbarrrrr |
> gawk '{ match($0, /(fo+).+(bar*)/, arr)
>         print arr[1], arr[2] }'
+ fo000 barrrrr
```

In addition, multidimensional subscripts are available providing the start index and length of each matched subexpression:

```
$ echo fo000bazzbarrrrr |
> gawk '{ match($0, /(fo+).(bar*)/, arr)
>         print arr[1], arr[2]
>         print arr[1, "start"], arr[1, "length"]
>         print arr[2, "start"], arr[2, "length"]
> }'
+ fo000 barrrrr
+ 1 5
+ 9 7
```

There may not be subscripts for the start and index for every parenthesized subexpression, since they may not all have matched text; thus they should be tested for with the `in` operator (see [Section 8.1.2 \[Referring to an Array Element\]](#), page 136).

The `array` argument to `match()` is a `gawk` extension. In compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), using a third argument is a fatal error.

`patsplit(string, array [, fieldpat [, seps ]]) #`

Divide `string` into pieces defined by `fieldpat` and store the pieces in `array` and the separator strings in the `seps` array. The first piece is stored in `array[1]`, the second piece in `array[2]`, and so forth. The third argument, `fieldpat`, is a regexp describing the fields in `string` (just as `FPAT` is a regexp describing the fields in input records). It may be either a regexp constant or a string. If `fieldpat` is omitted, the value of `FPAT` is used. `patsplit()` returns the number of elements created. `seps[i]` is the separator string between `array[i]` and `array[i+1]`. Any leading separator will be in `seps[0]`.

The `patsplit()` function splits strings into pieces in a manner similar to the way input lines are split into fields using `FPAT` (see [Section 4.7 \[Defining Fields By Content\]](#), page 63).

Before splitting the string, `patsplit()` deletes any previously existing elements in the arrays `array` and `seps`.

The `patsplit()` function is a `gawk` extension. In compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), it is not available.

`split(string, array [, fieldsep [, seps ]])`

Divide `string` into pieces separated by `fieldsep` and store the pieces in `array` and the separator strings in the `seps` array. The first piece is stored in `array[1]`, the second piece in `array[2]`, and so forth. The string value of the third argument, `fieldsep`, is a regexp describing where to split `string` (much as `FS` can be a regexp describing where to split input records; see [Section 4.5.2 \[Using Regular Expressions to Separate Fields\]](#), page 57). If `fieldsep` is omitted, the value of `FS` is used. `split()` returns the number of elements created. `seps` is a `gawk` extension with `seps[i]` being the separator string between `array[i]` and `array[i+1]`. If `fieldsep` is a single space then any leading whitespace goes into

`seps[0]` and any trailing whitespace goes into `seps[n]` where  $n$  is the return value of `split()` (that is, the number of elements in *array*).

The `split()` function splits strings into pieces in a manner similar to the way input lines are split into fields. For example:

```
split("cul-de-sac", a, "-", seps)
```

splits the string ‘cul-de-sac’ into three fields using ‘-’ as the separator. It sets the contents of the array `a` as follows:

```
a[1] = "cul"
a[2] = "de"
a[3] = "sac"
```

and sets the contents of the array `seps` as follows:

```
seps[1] = "-"
seps[2] = "-"
```

The value returned by this call to `split()` is three.

As with input field-splitting, when the value of *fieldsep* is " ", leading and trailing whitespace is ignored in values assigned to the elements of *array* but not in *seps*, and the elements are separated by runs of whitespace. Also as with input field-splitting, if *fieldsep* is the null string, each individual character in the string is split into its own array element. (c.e.)

Note, however, that `RS` has no effect on the way `split()` works. Even though ‘`RS = ""`’ causes newline to also be an input field separator, this does not affect how `split()` splits strings.

Modern implementations of `awk`, including `gawk`, allow the third argument to be a regexp constant (`/abc/`) as well as a string. The POSIX standard allows this as well. See [Section 3.8 \[Using Dynamic Regexpes\], page 47](#), for a discussion of the difference between using a string constant or a regexp constant, and the implications for writing your program correctly.



Before splitting the string, `split()` deletes any previously existing elements in the arrays *array* and *seps*.

If *string* is null, the array has no elements. (So this is a portable way to delete an entire array with one statement. See [Section 8.2 \[The delete Statement\], page 139](#).)

If *string* does not match *fieldsep* at all (but is not null), *array* has one element only. The value of that element is the original *string*.

```
sprintf(format, expression1, ...)
```

Return (without printing) the string that `printf` would have printed out with the same arguments (see [Section 5.5 \[Using printf Statements for Fancier Printing\], page 76](#)). For example:

```
pival = sprintf("pi = %.2f (approx.)", 22/7)
```

assigns the string ‘pi = 3.14 (approx.)’ to the variable `pival`.

```
strtonum(str) #
```

Examine *str* and return its numeric value. If *str* begins with a leading ‘0’, `strtonum()` assumes that *str* is an octal number. If *str* begins with a lead-

ing ‘0x’ or ‘0X’, `strtonum()` assumes that *str* is a hexadecimal number. For example:

```
$ echo 0x11 |
> gawk '{ printf "%d\n", strtonum($1) }'
+ 17
```

Using the `strtonum()` function is *not* the same as adding zero to a string value; the automatic coercion of strings to numbers works only for decimal data, not for octal or hexadecimal.<sup>4</sup>

Note also that `strtonum()` uses the current locale’s decimal point for recognizing numbers (see [Section 6.6 \[Where You Are Makes A Difference\]](#), page 110). `strtonum()` is a `gawk` extension; it is not available in compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

`sub(regex, replacement [, target])`

Search *target*, which is treated as a string, for the leftmost, longest substring matched by the regular expression *regex*. Modify the entire string by replacing the matched text with *replacement*. The modified string becomes the new value of *target*. Return the number of substitutions made (zero or one).

The *regex* argument may be either a regex constant (`/.../`) or a string constant (`"..."`). In the latter case, the string is treated as a regex to be matched. See [Section 3.8 \[Using Dynamic Regexp\]](#), page 47, for a discussion of the difference between the two forms, and the implications for writing your program correctly.

This function is peculiar because *target* is not simply used to compute a value, and not just any expression will do—it must be a variable, field, or array element so that `sub()` can store a modified value there. If this argument is omitted, then the default is to use and alter `$0`.<sup>5</sup> For example:

```
str = "water, water, everywhere"
sub(/at/, "ith", str)
```

sets `str` to ‘wither, water, everywhere’, by replacing the leftmost longest occurrence of ‘at’ with ‘ith’.

If the special character ‘&’ appears in *replacement*, it stands for the precise substring that was matched by *regex*. (If the regex can match more than one string, then this precise substring may vary.) For example:

```
{ sub(/candidate/, "& and his wife"); print }
```

changes the first occurrence of ‘candidate’ to ‘candidate and his wife’ on each input line. Here is another example:

```
$ awk 'BEGIN {
>     str = "daabaaa"
>     sub(/a+/, "C&C", str)
```

<sup>4</sup> Unless you use the ‘`--non-decimal-data`’ option, which isn’t recommended. See [Section 11.1 \[Allowing Nondecimal Input Data\]](#), page 195, for more information.

<sup>5</sup> Note that this means that the record will first be regenerated using the value of `OFS` if any fields have been changed, and that the fields will be updated after the substitution, even if the operation is a “no-op” such as ‘`sub(/~/, "")`’.

```
>         print str
> }'
+ dCaaCbaaa
```

This shows how ‘&’ can represent a nonconstant string and also illustrates the “leftmost, longest” rule in regexp matching (see [Section 3.7 \[How Much Text Matches?\]](#), page 46).

The effect of this special character (‘&’) can be turned off by putting a backslash before it in the string. As usual, to insert one backslash in the string, you must write two backslashes. Therefore, write ‘\&’ in a string constant to include a literal ‘&’ in the replacement. For example, the following shows how to replace the first ‘|’ on each line with an ‘&’:

```
{ sub(/\|/, "\\&"); print }
```

As mentioned, the third argument to `sub()` must be a variable, field or array element. Some versions of `awk` allow the third argument to be an expression that is not an lvalue. In such a case, `sub()` still searches for the pattern and returns zero or one, but the result of the substitution (if any) is thrown away because there is no place to put it. Such versions of `awk` accept expressions like the following:

```
sub(/USA/, "United States", "the USA and Canada")
```

For historical compatibility, `gawk` accepts such erroneous code. However, using any other nonchangeable object as the third parameter causes a fatal error and your program will not run.

Finally, if the *regexp* is not a regexp constant, it is converted into a string, and then the value of that string is treated as the regexp to match.

`substr(string, start [, length])`

Return a *length*-character-long substring of *string*, starting at character number *start*. The first character of a string is character number one.<sup>6</sup> For example, `substr("washington", 5, 3)` returns "ing".

If *length* is not present, `substr()` returns the whole suffix of *string* that begins at character number *start*. For example, `substr("washington", 5)` returns "ington". The whole suffix is also returned if *length* is greater than the number of characters remaining in the string, counting from character *start*.

If *start* is less than one, `substr()` treats it as if it was one. (POSIX doesn’t specify what to do in this case: Brian Kernighan’s `awk` acts this way, and therefore `gawk` does too.) If *start* is greater than the number of characters in the string, `substr()` returns the null string. Similarly, if *length* is present but less than or equal to zero, the null string is returned.

The string returned by `substr()` *cannot* be assigned. Thus, it is a mistake to attempt to change a portion of a string, as shown in the following example:

```
string = "abcdef"
# try to get "abCDEf", won't work
substr(string, 3, 3) = "CDE"
```

It is also a mistake to use `substr()` as the third argument of `sub()` or `gsub()`:

<sup>6</sup> This is different from C and C++, in which the first character is number zero.

```
gsub(/xyz/, "pdq", substr($0, 5, 20)) # WRONG
```

(Some commercial versions of `awk` treat `substr()` as assignable, but doing so is not portable.)

If you need to replace bits and pieces of a string, combine `substr()` with string concatenation, in the following manner:

```
string = "abcdef"
...
string = substr(string, 1, 2) "CDE" substr(string, 6)
```

`tolower(string)`

Return a copy of *string*, with each uppercase character in the string replaced with its corresponding lowercase character. Nonalphabetic characters are left unchanged. For example, `tolower("MiXeD cAsE 123")` returns "mixed case 123".

`toupper(string)`

Return a copy of *string*, with each lowercase character in the string replaced with its corresponding uppercase character. Nonalphabetic characters are left unchanged. For example, `toupper("MiXeD cAsE 123")` returns "MIXED CASE 123".

### 9.1.3.1 More About ‘\’ and ‘&’ with `sub()`, `gsub()`, and `gensub()`

When using `sub()`, `gsub()`, or `gensub()`, and trying to get literal backslashes and ampersands into the replacement text, you need to remember that there are several levels of *escape processing* going on.

First, there is the *lexical* level, which is when `awk` reads your program and builds an internal copy of it that can be executed. Then there is the runtime level, which is when `awk` actually scans the replacement string to determine what to generate.

At both levels, `awk` looks for a defined set of characters that can come after a backslash. At the lexical level, it looks for the escape sequences listed in [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), [page 38](#). Thus, for every ‘\’ that `awk` processes at the runtime level, you must type two backslashes at the lexical level. When a character that is not valid for an escape sequence follows the ‘\’, Brian Kernighan’s `awk` and `gawk` both simply remove the initial ‘\’ and put the next character into the string. Thus, for example, "a\qb" is treated as "aqb".

At the runtime level, the various functions handle sequences of ‘\’ and ‘&’ differently. The situation is (sadly) somewhat complex. Historically, the `sub()` and `gsub()` functions treated the two character sequence ‘\&’ specially; this sequence was replaced in the generated text with a single ‘&’. Any other ‘\’ within the *replacement* string that did not precede an ‘&’ was passed through unchanged. This is illustrated in [Table 9.1](#).

You type	sub() sees	sub() generates
<code>\&amp;</code>	<code>&amp;</code>	the matched text
<code>\\&amp;</code>	<code>\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘&’
<code>\\\&amp;</code>	<code>\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘&’
<code>\\\\&amp;</code>	<code>\\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘\&’
<code>\\\&amp;</code>	<code>\\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘\&’
<code>\\\\\&amp;</code>	<code>\\\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘\\&’
<code>\\q</code>	<code>\q</code>	a literal ‘\q’

Table 9.1: Historical Escape Sequence Processing for `sub()` and `gsub()`

This table shows both the lexical-level processing, where an odd number of backslashes becomes an even number at the runtime level, as well as the runtime processing done by `sub()`. (For the sake of simplicity, the rest of the following tables only show the case of even numbers of backslashes entered at the lexical level.)

The problem with the historical approach is that there is no way to get a literal ‘\’ followed by the matched text.

The POSIX rules state that ‘\&’ in the replacement string produces a literal ‘&’, ‘\\’ produces a literal ‘\’, and ‘\’ followed by anything else is not special; the ‘\’ is placed straight into the output. These rules are presented in [Table 9.2](#).

You type	sub() sees	sub() generates
<code>\\\\\&amp;</code>	<code>\\\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘\&’
<code>\\\&amp;</code>	<code>\\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘\’, followed by the matched text
<code>\\&amp;</code>	<code>\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘&’
<code>\\q</code>	<code>\q</code>	a literal ‘\q’
<code>\\\\</code>	<code>\\</code>	\\

Table 9.2: POSIX rules for `sub()` and `gsub()`

`gawk` follows the POSIX rules.

The rules for `gensub()` are considerably simpler. At the runtime level, whenever `gawk` sees a ‘\’, if the following character is a digit, then the text that matched the corresponding parenthesized subexpression is placed in the generated output. Otherwise, no matter what character follows the ‘\’, it appears in the generated text and the ‘\’ does not, as shown in [Table 9.3](#).

You type	<code>gensub()</code> sees	<code>gensub()</code> generates
<code>&amp;</code>	<code>&amp;</code>	the matched text
<code>\\&amp;</code>	<code>\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘&’
<code>\\\\</code>	<code>\\</code>	a literal ‘\’
<code>\\\\&amp;</code>	<code>\\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘\’, then the matched text
<code>\\\\\\&amp;</code>	<code>\\\\&amp;</code>	a literal ‘\&’
<code>\\\\q</code>	<code>\\q</code>	a literal ‘q’

Table 9.3: Escape Sequence Processing for `gensub()`

Because of the complexity of the lexical and runtime level processing and the special cases for `sub()` and `gsub()`, we recommend the use of `gawk` and `gensub()` when you have to do substitutions.

### Advanced Notes: Matching the Null String

In `awk`, the ‘\*’ operator can match the null string. This is particularly important for the `sub()`, `gsub()`, and `gensub()` functions. For example:

```
$ echo abc | awk '{ gsub(/m*/, "X"); print }'
→ XaXbXcX
```

Although this makes a certain amount of sense, it can be surprising.

## 9.1.4 Input/Output Functions

The following functions relate to input/output (I/O). Optional parameters are enclosed in square brackets ([ ]):

`close(filename [, how])`

Close the file `filename` for input or output. Alternatively, the argument may be a shell command that was used for creating a coprocess, or for redirecting to or from a pipe; then the coprocess or pipe is closed. See [Section 5.8 \[Closing Input and Output Redirections\]](#), page 86, for more information.

When closing a coprocess, it is occasionally useful to first close one end of the two-way pipe and then to close the other. This is done by providing a second argument to `close()`. This second argument should be one of the two string values “to” or “from”, indicating which end of the pipe to close. Case in the string does not matter. See [Section 11.3 \[Two-Way Communications with Another Process\]](#), page 203, which discusses this feature in more detail and gives an example.

`fflush([filename])`

Flush any buffered output associated with `filename`, which is either a file opened for writing or a shell command for redirecting output to a pipe or coprocess. (c.e.).

Many utility programs *buffer* their output; i.e., they save information to write to a disk file or the screen in memory until there is enough for it to be worthwhile

to send the data to the output device. This is often more efficient than writing every little bit of information as soon as it is ready. However, sometimes it is necessary to force a program to *flush* its buffers; that is, write the information to its destination, even if a buffer is not full. This is the purpose of the `fflush()` function—`gawk` also buffers its output and the `fflush()` function forces `gawk` to flush its buffers.

`fflush()` was added to Brian Kernighan's version of `awk` in 1994; it is not part of the POSIX standard and is not available if `--posix` has been specified on the command line (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

`gawk` extends the `fflush()` function in two ways. The first is to allow no argument at all. In this case, the buffer for the standard output is flushed. The second is to allow the null string (`"`) as the argument. In this case, the buffers for *all* open output files and pipes are flushed. Brian Kernighan's `awk` also supports these extensions.

`fflush()` returns zero if the buffer is successfully flushed; otherwise, it returns `-1`. In the case where all buffers are flushed, the return value is zero only if all buffers were flushed successfully. Otherwise, it is `-1`, and `gawk` warns about the problem *filename*.

`gawk` also issues a warning message if you attempt to flush a file or pipe that was opened for reading (such as with `getline`), or if *filename* is not an open file, pipe, or coprocess. In such a case, `fflush()` returns `-1`, as well.

#### `system(command)`

Execute the operating-system command *command* and then return to the `awk` program. Return *command*'s exit status.

For example, if the following fragment of code is put in your `awk` program:

```
END {
    system("date | mail -s 'awk run done' root")
}
```

the system administrator is sent mail when the `awk` program finishes processing input and begins its end-of-input processing.

Note that redirecting `print` or `printf` into a pipe is often enough to accomplish your task. If you need to run many commands, it is more efficient to simply print them down a pipeline to the shell:

```
while (more stuff to do)
    print command | "/bin/sh"
close("/bin/sh")
```

However, if your `awk` program is interactive, `system()` is useful for running large self-contained programs, such as a shell or an editor. Some operating systems cannot implement the `system()` function. `system()` causes a fatal error if it is not supported.

**NOTE:** When `--sandbox` is specified, the `system()` function is disabled (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

**Advanced Notes: Interactive Versus Noninteractive Buffering**

As a side point, buffering issues can be even more confusing, depending upon whether your program is *interactive*, i.e., communicating with a user sitting at a keyboard.<sup>7</sup>

Interactive programs generally *line buffer* their output; i.e., they write out every line. Noninteractive programs wait until they have a full buffer, which may be many lines of output. Here is an example of the difference:

```
$ awk '{ print $1 + $2 }'
1 1
+ 2
2 3
+ 5
Ctrl-d
```

Each line of output is printed immediately. Compare that behavior with this example:

```
$ awk '{ print $1 + $2 }' | cat
1 1
2 3
Ctrl-d
+ 2
+ 5
```

Here, no output is printed until after the *Ctrl-d* is typed, because it is all buffered and sent down the pipe to *cat* in one shot.

**Advanced Notes: Controlling Output Buffering with `system()`**

The `fflush()` function provides explicit control over output buffering for individual files and pipes. However, its use is not portable to many other `awk` implementations. An alternative method to flush output buffers is to call `system()` with a null string as its argument:

```
system("") # flush output
```

`gawk` treats this use of the `system()` function as a special case and is smart enough not to run a shell (or other command interpreter) with the empty command. Therefore, with `gawk`, this idiom is not only useful, it is also efficient. While this method should work with other `awk` implementations, it does not necessarily avoid starting an unnecessary shell. (Other implementations may only flush the buffer associated with the standard output and not necessarily all buffered output.)

If you think about what a programmer expects, it makes sense that `system()` should flush any pending output. The following program:

```
BEGIN {
    print "first print"
    system("echo system echo")
    print "second print"
}
```

must print:

---

<sup>7</sup> A program is interactive if the standard output is connected to a terminal device. On modern systems, this means your keyboard and screen.

```

first print
system echo
second print

```

and not:

```

system echo
first print
second print

```

If `awk` did not flush its buffers before calling `system()`, you would see the latter (undesirable) output.

### 9.1.5 Time Functions

`awk` programs are commonly used to process log files containing timestamp information, indicating when a particular log record was written. Many programs log their timestamp in the form returned by the `time()` system call, which is the number of seconds since a particular epoch. On POSIX-compliant systems, it is the number of seconds since 1970-01-01 00:00:00 UTC, not counting leap seconds.<sup>8</sup> All known POSIX-compliant systems support timestamps from 0 through  $2^{31} - 1$ , which is sufficient to represent times through 2038-01-19 03:14:07 UTC. Many systems support a wider range of timestamps, including negative timestamps that represent times before the epoch.

In order to make it easier to process such log files and to produce useful reports, `gawk` provides the following functions for working with timestamps. They are `gawk` extensions; they are not specified in the POSIX standard, nor are they in any other known version of `awk`.<sup>9</sup> Optional parameters are enclosed in square brackets (`[ ]`):

`mktime(datespec)`

Turn *datespec* into a timestamp in the same form as is returned by `systemtime()`. It is similar to the function of the same name in ISO C. The argument, *datespec*, is a string of the form "`YYYY MM DD HH MM SS [DST]`". The string consists of six or seven numbers representing, respectively, the full year including century, the month from 1 to 12, the day of the month from 1 to 31, the hour of the day from 0 to 23, the minute from 0 to 59, the second from 0 to 60,<sup>10</sup> and an optional daylight-savings flag.

The values of these numbers need not be within the ranges specified; for example, an hour of `-1` means 1 hour before midnight. The origin-zero Gregorian calendar is assumed, with year 0 preceding year 1 and year `-1` preceding year 0. The time is assumed to be in the local timezone. If the daylight-savings flag is positive, the time is assumed to be daylight savings time; if zero, the time is assumed to be standard time; and if negative (the default), `mktime()` attempts to determine whether daylight savings time is in effect for the specified time.

If *datespec* does not contain enough elements or if the resulting time is out of range, `mktime()` returns `-1`.

<sup>8</sup> See [Glossary], page 347, especially the entries “Epoch” and “UTC.”

<sup>9</sup> The GNU `date` utility can also do many of the things described here. Its use may be preferable for simple time-related operations in shell scripts.

<sup>10</sup> Occasionally there are minutes in a year with a leap second, which is why the seconds can go up to 60.

`strftime([format [, timestamp [, utc-flag]])`

Format the time specified by *timestamp* based on the contents of the *format* string and return the result. It is similar to the function of the same name in ISO C. If *utc-flag* is present and is either nonzero or non-null, the value is formatted as UTC (Coordinated Universal Time, formerly GMT or Greenwich Mean Time). Otherwise, the value is formatted for the local time zone. The *timestamp* is in the same format as the value returned by the `systemtime()` function. If no *timestamp* argument is supplied, `gawk` uses the current time of day as the timestamp. If no *format* argument is supplied, `strftime()` uses the value of `PROCINFO["strftime"]` as the format string (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126). The default string value is `"%a %b %e %H:%M:%S %Z %Y"`. This format string produces output that is equivalent to that of the `date` utility. You can assign a new value to `PROCINFO["strftime"]` to change the default format.

`systemtime()`

Return the current time as the number of seconds since the system epoch. On POSIX systems, this is the number of seconds since 1970-01-01 00:00:00 UTC, not counting leap seconds. It may be a different number on other systems.

The `systemtime()` function allows you to compare a timestamp from a log file with the current time of day. In particular, it is easy to determine how long ago a particular record was logged. It also allows you to produce log records using the “seconds since the epoch” format.

The `mktime()` function allows you to convert a textual representation of a date and time into a timestamp. This makes it easy to do before/after comparisons of dates and times, particularly when dealing with date and time data coming from an external source, such as a log file.

The `strftime()` function allows you to easily turn a timestamp into human-readable information. It is similar in nature to the `sprintf()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149), in that it copies nonformat specification characters verbatim to the returned string, while substituting date and time values for format specifications in the *format* string.

`strftime()` is guaranteed by the 1999 ISO C standard<sup>11</sup> to support the following date format specifications:

<code>%a</code>	The locale’s abbreviated weekday name.
<code>%A</code>	The locale’s full weekday name.
<code>%b</code>	The locale’s abbreviated month name.
<code>%B</code>	The locale’s full month name.
<code>%c</code>	The locale’s “appropriate” date and time representation. (This is ‘ <code>%A %B %d %T %Y</code> ’ in the “C” locale.)
<code>%C</code>	The century part of the current year. This is the year divided by 100 and truncated to the next lower integer.

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, not every system’s `strftime()` necessarily supports all of the conversions listed here.

%d	The day of the month as a decimal number (01–31).
%D	Equivalent to specifying ‘%m/%d/%y’.
%e	The day of the month, padded with a space if it is only one digit.
%F	Equivalent to specifying ‘%Y-%m-%d’. This is the ISO 8601 date format.
%g	The year modulo 100 of the ISO 8601 week number, as a decimal number (00–99). For example, January 1, 1993 is in week 53 of 1992. Thus, the year of its ISO 8601 week number is 1992, even though its year is 1993. Similarly, December 31, 1973 is in week 1 of 1974. Thus, the year of its ISO week number is 1974, even though its year is 1973.
%G	The full year of the ISO week number, as a decimal number.
%h	Equivalent to ‘%b’.
%H	The hour (24-hour clock) as a decimal number (00–23).
%I	The hour (12-hour clock) as a decimal number (01–12).
%j	The day of the year as a decimal number (001–366).
%m	The month as a decimal number (01–12).
%M	The minute as a decimal number (00–59).
%n	A newline character (ASCII LF).
%p	The locale’s equivalent of the AM/PM designations associated with a 12-hour clock.
%r	The locale’s 12-hour clock time. (This is ‘%I:%M:%S %p’ in the "C" locale.)
%R	Equivalent to specifying ‘%H:%M’.
%S	The second as a decimal number (00–60).
%t	A TAB character.
%T	Equivalent to specifying ‘%H:%M:%S’.
%u	The weekday as a decimal number (1–7). Monday is day one.
%U	The week number of the year (the first Sunday as the first day of week one) as a decimal number (00–53).
%V	The week number of the year (the first Monday as the first day of week one) as a decimal number (01–53). The method for determining the week number is as specified by ISO 8601. (To wit: if the week containing January 1 has four or more days in the new year, then it is week one; otherwise it is week 53 of the previous year and the next week is week one.)
%w	The weekday as a decimal number (0–6). Sunday is day zero.
%W	The week number of the year (the first Monday as the first day of week one) as a decimal number (00–53).
%x	The locale’s “appropriate” date representation. (This is ‘%A %B %d %Y’ in the "C" locale.)

<code>%X</code>	The locale’s “appropriate” time representation. (This is ‘%T’ in the “C” locale.)
<code>%y</code>	The year modulo 100 as a decimal number (00–99).
<code>%Y</code>	The full year as a decimal number (e.g., 2011).
<code>%z</code>	The timezone offset in a +HHMM format (e.g., the format necessary to produce RFC 822/RFC 1036 date headers).
<code>%Z</code>	The time zone name or abbreviation; no characters if no time zone is determinable.
<code>%Ec %EC %Ex %EX %Ey %EY %Od %Oe %OH</code> <code>%OI %Om %OM %OS %Ou %OU %OV %Ow %OW %Oy</code>	“Alternate representations” for the specifications that use only the second letter (‘%c’, ‘%C’, and so on). <sup>12</sup> (These facilitate compliance with the POSIX <code>date</code> utility.)
<code>%%</code>	A literal ‘%’.

If a conversion specifier is not one of the above, the behavior is undefined.<sup>13</sup>

Informally, a *locale* is the geographic place in which a program is meant to run. For example, a common way to abbreviate the date September 4, 2012 in the United States is “9/4/12.” In many countries in Europe, however, it is abbreviated “4.9.12.” Thus, the ‘%x’ specification in a “US” locale might produce ‘9/4/12’, while in a “EUROPE” locale, it might produce ‘4.9.12’. The ISO C standard defines a default “C” locale, which is an environment that is typical of what many C programmers are used to.

For systems that are not yet fully standards-compliant, `gawk` supplies a copy of `strftime()` from the GNU C Library. It supports all of the just-listed format specifications. If that version is used to compile `gawk` (see [Appendix B \[Installing gawk\], page 309](#)), then the following additional format specifications are available:

<code>%k</code>	The hour (24-hour clock) as a decimal number (0–23). Single-digit numbers are padded with a space.
<code>%l</code>	The hour (12-hour clock) as a decimal number (1–12). Single-digit numbers are padded with a space.
<code>%s</code>	The time as a decimal timestamp in seconds since the epoch.

Additionally, the alternate representations are recognized but their normal representations are used.

The following example is an `awk` implementation of the POSIX `date` utility. Normally, the `date` utility prints the current date and time of day in a well-known format. However, if you provide an argument to it that begins with a ‘+’, `date` copies nonformat specifier characters to the standard output and interprets the current time according to the format specifiers in the string. For example:

<sup>12</sup> If you don’t understand any of this, don’t worry about it; these facilities are meant to make it easier to “internationalize” programs. Other internationalization features are described in [Chapter 10 \[Internationalization with gawk\], page 185](#).

<sup>13</sup> This is because ISO C leaves the behavior of the C version of `strftime()` undefined and `gawk` uses the system’s version of `strftime()` if it’s there. Typically, the conversion specifier either does not appear in the returned string or appears literally.

```
$ date '+Today is %A, %B %d, %Y.'
- Today is Wednesday, March 30, 2011.
```

Here is the `gawk` version of the `date` utility. It has a shell “wrapper” to handle the `-u` option, which requires that `date` run as if the time zone is set to UTC:

```
#!/bin/sh
#
# date --- approximate the POSIX 'date' command

case $1 in
-u) TZ=UTC0      # use UTC
    export TZ
    shift ;;
esac

gawk 'BEGIN {
    format = "%a %b %e %H:%M:%S %Z %Y"
    exitval = 0

    if (ARGC > 2)
        exitval = 1
    else if (ARGC == 2) {
        format = ARGV[1]
        if (format ~ /\^\/)
            format = substr(format, 2) # remove leading +
    }
    print strftime(format)
    exit exitval
}' "$@"
```

### 9.1.6 Bit-Manipulation Functions

*I can explain it for you, but I can't understand it for you.*

Anonymous

Many languages provide the ability to perform *bitwise* operations on two integer numbers. In other words, the operation is performed on each successive pair of bits in the operands. Three common operations are bitwise AND, OR, and XOR. The operations are described in [Table 9.4](#).

Operands	Bit operator					
	AND		OR		XOR	
	0	1	0	1	0	1
0	0	0	0	1	0	1
1	0	1	1	1	1	0

Table 9.4: Bitwise Operations

As you can see, the result of an AND operation is 1 only when *both* bits are 1. The result of an OR operation is 1 if *either* bit is 1. The result of an XOR operation is 1 if either bit is 1, but not both. The next operation is the *complement*; the complement of 1 is 0 and the complement of 0 is 1. Thus, this operation “flips” all the bits of a given value.

Finally, two other common operations are to shift the bits left or right. For example, if you have a bit string ‘10111001’ and you shift it right by three bits, you end up with ‘00010111’.<sup>14</sup> If you start over again with ‘10111001’ and shift it left by three bits, you end up with ‘11001000’. `gawk` provides built-in functions that implement the bitwise operations just described. They are:

`and(v1, v2)`

Return the bitwise AND of the values provided by *v1* and *v2*.

`compl(val)`

Return the bitwise complement of *val*.

`lshift(val, count)`

Return the value of *val*, shifted left by *count* bits.

`or(v1, v2)`

Return the bitwise OR of the values provided by *v1* and *v2*.

`rshift(val, count)`

Return the value of *val*, shifted right by *count* bits.

`xor(v1, v2)`

Return the bitwise XOR of the values provided by *v1* and *v2*.

For all of these functions, first the double precision floating-point value is converted to the widest C unsigned integer type, then the bitwise operation is performed. If the result cannot be represented exactly as a C `double`, leading nonzero bits are removed one by one until it can be represented exactly. The result is then converted back into a C `double`. (If you don’t understand this paragraph, don’t worry about it.)

Here is a user-defined function (see [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170) that illustrates the use of these functions:

---

<sup>14</sup> This example shows that 0’s come in on the left side. For `gawk`, this is always true, but in some languages, it’s possible to have the left side fill with 1’s. Caveat emptor.

```

# bits2str --- turn a byte into readable 1's and 0's

function bits2str(bits,      data, mask)
{
    if (bits == 0)
        return "0"

    mask = 1
    for (; bits != 0; bits = rshift(bits, 1))
        data = (and(bits, mask) ? "1" : "0") data

    while ((length(data) % 8) != 0)
        data = "0" data

    return data
}

BEGIN {
    printf "123 = %s\n", bits2str(123)
    printf "0123 = %s\n", bits2str(0123)
    printf "0x99 = %s\n", bits2str(0x99)
    comp = compl(0x99)
    printf "compl(0x99) = %#x = %s\n", comp, bits2str(comp)
    shift = lshift(0x99, 2)
    printf "lshift(0x99, 2) = %#x = %s\n", shift, bits2str(shift)
    shift = rshift(0x99, 2)
    printf "rshift(0x99, 2) = %#x = %s\n", shift, bits2str(shift)
}

```

This program produces the following output when run:

```

$ gawk -f testbits.awk
+ 123 = 01111011
+ 0123 = 01010011
+ 0x99 = 10011001
+ compl(0x99) = 0xfffff66 = 1111111111111111111111111111111101100110
+ lshift(0x99, 2) = 0x264 = 0000001001100100
+ rshift(0x99, 2) = 0x26 = 00100110

```

The `bits2str()` function turns a binary number into a string. The number 1 represents a binary value where the rightmost bit is set to 1. Using this mask, the function repeatedly checks the rightmost bit. ANDing the mask with the value indicates whether the rightmost bit is 1 or not. If so, a "1" is concatenated onto the front of the string. Otherwise, a "0" is added. The value is then shifted right by one bit and the loop continues until there are no more 1 bits.

If the initial value is zero it returns a simple "0". Otherwise, at the end, it pads the value with zeros to represent multiples of 8-bit quantities. This is typical in modern computers.

The main code in the `BEGIN` rule shows the difference between the decimal and octal values for the same numbers (see [Section 6.1.1.2 \[Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers\]](#), page 89), and then demonstrates the results of the `compl()`, `lshift()`, and `rshift()` functions.

### 9.1.7 Getting Type Information

`gawk` provides a single function that lets you distinguish an array from a scalar variable. This is necessary for writing code that traverses every element of a true multidimensional array (see [Section 8.6 \[Arrays of Arrays\]](#), page 144).

`isarray(x)`

Return a true value if `x` is an array. Otherwise return false.

### 9.1.8 String-Translation Functions

`gawk` provides facilities for internationalizing `awk` programs. These include the functions described in the following list. The descriptions here are purposely brief. See [Chapter 10 \[Internationalization with gawk\]](#), page 185, for the full story. Optional parameters are enclosed in square brackets (`[ ]`):

`bindtextdomain(directory [, domain])`

Set the directory in which `gawk` will look for message translation files, in case they will not or cannot be placed in the “standard” locations (e.g., during testing). It returns the directory in which `domain` is “bound.”

The default `domain` is the value of `TEXTDOMAIN`. If `directory` is the null string (`""`), then `bindtextdomain()` returns the current binding for the given `domain`.

`dcgettext(string [, domain [, category]])`

Return the translation of `string` in text domain `domain` for locale category `category`. The default value for `domain` is the current value of `TEXTDOMAIN`. The default value for `category` is `"LC_MESSAGES"`.

`dcngettext(string1, string2, number [, domain [, category]])`

Return the plural form used for `number` of the translation of `string1` and `string2` in text domain `domain` for locale category `category`. `string1` is the English singular variant of a message, and `string2` the English plural variant of the same message. The default value for `domain` is the current value of `TEXTDOMAIN`. The default value for `category` is `"LC_MESSAGES"`.

## 9.2 User-Defined Functions

Complicated `awk` programs can often be simplified by defining your own functions. User-defined functions can be called just like built-in ones (see [Section 6.4 \[Function Calls\]](#), page 107), but it is up to you to define them, i.e., to tell `awk` what they should do.

### 9.2.1 Function Definition Syntax

Definitions of functions can appear anywhere between the rules of an `awk` program. Thus, the general form of an `awk` program is extended to include sequences of rules *and* user-defined function definitions. There is no need to put the definition of a function before all uses of the function. This is because `awk` reads the entire program before starting to execute any of it.

The definition of a function named *name* looks like this:

```
function name([parameter-list])
{
    body-of-function
}
```

Here, *name* is the name of the function to define. A valid function name is like a valid variable name: a sequence of letters, digits, and underscores that doesn't start with a digit. Within a single `awk` program, any particular name can only be used as a variable, array, or function.

*parameter-list* is an optional list of the function's arguments and local variable names, separated by commas. When the function is called, the argument names are used to hold the argument values given in the call. The local variables are initialized to the empty string. A function cannot have two parameters with the same name, nor may it have a parameter with the same name as the function itself.

In addition, according to the POSIX standard, function parameters cannot have the same name as one of the special built-in variables (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126). Not all versions of `awk` enforce this restriction.

The *body-of-function* consists of `awk` statements. It is the most important part of the definition, because it says what the function should actually *do*. The argument names exist to give the body a way to talk about the arguments; local variables exist to give the body places to keep temporary values.

Argument names are not distinguished syntactically from local variable names. Instead, the number of arguments supplied when the function is called determines how many argument variables there are. Thus, if three argument values are given, the first three names in *parameter-list* are arguments and the rest are local variables.

It follows that if the number of arguments is not the same in all calls to the function, some of the names in *parameter-list* may be arguments on some occasions and local variables on others. Another way to think of this is that omitted arguments default to the null string.

Usually when you write a function, you know how many names you intend to use for arguments and how many you intend to use as local variables. It is conventional to place some extra space between the arguments and the local variables, in order to document how your function is supposed to be used.

During execution of the function body, the arguments and local variable values hide, or *shadow*, any variables of the same names used in the rest of the program. The shadowed variables are not accessible in the function definition, because there is no way to name them while their names have been taken away for the local variables. All other variables used in the `awk` program can be referenced or set normally in the function's body.

The arguments and local variables last only as long as the function body is executing. Once the body finishes, you can once again access the variables that were shadowed while the function was running.

The function body can contain expressions that call functions. They can even call this function, either directly or by way of another function. When this happens, we say the function is *recursive*. The act of a function calling itself is called *recursion*.

All the built-in functions return a value to their caller. User-defined functions can do also, using the `return` statement, which is described in detail in [Section 9.2.4 \[The return](#)

[Statement](#)], [page 177](#). Many of the subsequent examples in this section use the `return` statement.

In many `awk` implementations, including `gawk`, the keyword `function` may be abbreviated `func`. (c.e.) However, POSIX only specifies the use of the keyword `function`. This actually has some practical implications. If `gawk` is in POSIX-compatibility mode (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), [page 25](#)), then the following statement does *not* define a function:

```
func foo() { a = sqrt($1) ; print a }
```

Instead it defines a rule that, for each record, concatenates the value of the variable ‘`func`’ with the return value of the function ‘`foo`’. If the resulting string is non-null, the action is executed. This is probably not what is desired. (`awk` accepts this input as syntactically valid, because functions may be used before they are defined in `awk` programs.<sup>15</sup>)

To ensure that your `awk` programs are portable, always use the keyword `function` when defining a function.

## 9.2.2 Function Definition Examples

Here is an example of a user-defined function, called `myprint()`, that takes a number and prints it in a specific format:

```
function myprint(num)
{
    printf "%6.3g\n", num
}
```

To illustrate, here is an `awk` rule that uses our `myprint` function:

```
$3 > 0    { myprint($3) }
```

This program prints, in our special format, all the third fields that contain a positive number in our input. Therefore, when given the following input:

```
1.2  3.4  5.6  7.8
9.10 11.12 -13.14 15.16
17.18 19.20 21.22 23.24
```

this program, using our function to format the results, prints:

```
5.6
21.2
```

This function deletes all the elements in an array:

```
function delarray(a, i)
{
    for (i in a)
        delete a[i]
}
```

When working with arrays, it is often necessary to delete all the elements in an array and start over with a new list of elements (see [Section 8.2 \[The delete Statement\]](#), [page 139](#)). Instead of having to repeat this loop everywhere that you need to clear out an array, your

---

<sup>15</sup> This program won’t actually run, since `foo()` is undefined.

program can just call `delarray`. (This guarantees portability. The use of ‘`delete array`’ to delete the contents of an entire array is a nonstandard extension.)

The following is an example of a recursive function. It takes a string as an input parameter and returns the string in backwards order. Recursive functions must always have a test that stops the recursion. In this case, the recursion terminates when the starting position is zero, i.e., when there are no more characters left in the string.

```
function rev(str, start)
{
    if (start == 0)
        return ""

    return (substr(str, start, 1) rev(str, start - 1))
}
```

If this function is in a file named ‘`rev.awk`’, it can be tested this way:

```
$ echo "Don't Panic!" |
> gawk --source '{ print rev($0, length($0)) }' -f rev.awk
└ !cinaP t'noD
```

The C `ctime()` function takes a timestamp and returns it in a string, formatted in a well-known fashion. The following example uses the built-in `strftime()` function (see [Section 9.1.5 \[Time Functions\], page 163](#)) to create an `awk` version of `ctime()`:

```
# ctime.awk
#
# awk version of C ctime(3) function

function ctime(ts,    format)
{
    format = "%a %b %e %H:%M:%S %Z %Y"
    if (ts == 0)
        ts = systime()    # use current time as default
    return strftime(format, ts)
}
```

## 9.2.3 Calling User-Defined Functions

This section describes how to call a user-defined function.

### 9.2.3.1 Writing A Function Call

*Calling a function* means causing the function to run and do its job. A function call is an expression and its value is the value returned by the function.

A function call consists of the function name followed by the arguments in parentheses. `awk` expressions are what you write in the call for the arguments. Each time the call is executed, these expressions are evaluated, and the values become the actual arguments. For example, here is a call to `foo()` with three arguments (the first being a string concatenation):

```
foo(x y, "lose", 4 * z)
```

**CAUTION:** Whitespace characters (spaces and TABs) are not allowed between the function name and the open-parenthesis of the argument list. If you write

whitespace by mistake, `awk` might think that you mean to concatenate a variable with an expression in parentheses. However, it notices that you used a function name and not a variable name, and reports an error.

### 9.2.3.2 Controlling Variable Scope

There is no way to make a variable local to a `{ ... }` block in `awk`, but you can make a variable local to a function. It is good practice to do so whenever a variable is needed only in that function.

To make a variable local to a function, simply declare the variable as an argument after the actual function arguments (see [Section 9.2.1 \[Function Definition Syntax\]](#), page 170). Look at the following example where variable `i` is a global variable used by both functions `foo()` and `bar()`:

```
function bar()
{
    for (i = 0; i < 3; i++)
        print "bar's i=" i
}

function foo(j)
{
    i = j + 1
    print "foo's i=" i
    bar()
    print "foo's i=" i
}

BEGIN {
    i = 10
    print "top's i=" i
    foo(0)
    print "top's i=" i
}
```

Running this script produces the following, because the `i` in functions `foo()` and `bar()` and at the top level refer to the same variable instance:

```
top's i=10
foo's i=1
bar's i=0
bar's i=1
bar's i=2
foo's i=3
top's i=3
```

If you want `i` to be local to both `foo()` and `bar()` do as follows (the extra-space before `i` is a coding convention to indicate that `i` is a local variable, not an argument):

```
function bar(    i)
{
```

```

        for (i = 0; i < 3; i++)
            print "bar's i=" i
    }

function foo(j,    i)
{
    i = j + 1
    print "foo's i=" i
    bar()
    print "foo's i=" i
}

BEGIN {
    i = 10
    print "top's i=" i
    foo(0)
    print "top's i=" i
}

```

Running the corrected script produces the following:

```

top's i=10
foo's i=1
bar's i=0
bar's i=1
bar's i=2
foo's i=1
top's i=10

```

### 9.2.3.3 Passing Function Arguments By Value Or By Reference

In *awk*, when you declare a function, there is no way to declare explicitly whether the arguments are passed *by value* or *by reference*.

Instead the passing convention is determined at runtime when the function is called according to the following rule:

- If the argument is an array variable, then it is passed by reference,
- Otherwise the argument is passed by value.

Passing an argument by value means that when a function is called, it is given a *copy* of the value of this argument. The caller may use a variable as the expression for the argument, but the called function does not know this—it only knows what value the argument had. For example, if you write the following code:

```

foo = "bar"
z = myfunc(foo)

```

then you should not think of the argument to `myfunc()` as being “the variable `foo`.” Instead, think of the argument as the string value `"bar"`. If the function `myfunc()` alters the values of its local variables, this has no effect on any other variables. Thus, if `myfunc()` does this:

```

function myfunc(str)

```

```

{
    print str
    str = "zzz"
    print str
}

```

to change its first argument variable `str`, it does *not* change the value of `foo` in the caller. The role of `foo` in calling `myfunc()` ended when its value ("bar") was computed. If `str` also exists outside of `myfunc()`, the function body cannot alter this outer value, because it is shadowed during the execution of `myfunc()` and cannot be seen or changed from there.

However, when arrays are the parameters to functions, they are *not* copied. Instead, the array itself is made available for direct manipulation by the function. This is usually termed *call by reference*. Changes made to an array parameter inside the body of a function *are* visible outside that function.

**NOTE:** Changing an array parameter inside a function can be very dangerous if you do not watch what you are doing. For example:

```

function changeit(array, ind, nvalue)
{
    array[ind] = nvalue
}

BEGIN {
    a[1] = 1; a[2] = 2; a[3] = 3
    changeit(a, 2, "two")
    printf "a[1] = %s, a[2] = %s, a[3] = %s\n",
        a[1], a[2], a[3]
}

```

prints 'a[1] = 1, a[2] = two, a[3] = 3', because `changeit` stores "two" in the second element of `a`.

Some `awk` implementations allow you to call a function that has not been defined. They only report a problem at runtime when the program actually tries to call the function. For example:

```

BEGIN {
    if (0)
        foo()
    else
        bar()
}
function bar() { ... }
# note that 'foo' is not defined

```

Because the 'if' statement will never be true, it is not really a problem that `foo()` has not been defined. Usually, though, it is a problem if a program calls an undefined function.

If '`--lint`' is specified (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25), `gawk` reports calls to undefined functions.

Some `awk` implementations generate a runtime error if you use the `next` statement (see [Section 7.4.8 \[The next Statement\], page 124](#)) inside a user-defined function. `gawk` does not have this limitation.

### 9.2.4 The return Statement

As seen in several earlier examples, the body of a user-defined function can contain a `return` statement. This statement returns control to the calling part of the `awk` program. It can also be used to return a value for use in the rest of the `awk` program. It looks like this:

```
return [expression]
```

The *expression* part is optional. Due most likely to an oversight, POSIX does not define what the return value is if you omit the *expression*. Technically speaking, this makes the returned value undefined, and therefore, unpredictable. In practice, though, all versions of `awk` simply return the null string, which acts like zero if used in a numeric context.

A `return` statement with no value expression is assumed at the end of every function definition. So if control reaches the end of the function body, then technically, the function returns an unpredictable value. In practice, it returns the empty string. `awk` does *not* warn you if you use the return value of such a function.

Sometimes, you want to write a function for what it does, not for what it returns. Such a function corresponds to a `void` function in C, C++ or Java, or to a `procedure` in Ada. Thus, it may be appropriate to not return any value; simply bear in mind that you should not be using the return value of such a function.

The following is an example of a user-defined function that returns a value for the largest number among the elements of an array:

```
function maxelt(vec,  i, ret)
{
    for (i in vec) {
        if (ret == "" || vec[i] > ret)
            ret = vec[i]
    }
    return ret
}
```

You call `maxelt()` with one argument, which is an array name. The local variables `i` and `ret` are not intended to be arguments; while there is nothing to stop you from passing more than one argument to `maxelt()`, the results would be strange. The extra space before `i` in the function parameter list indicates that `i` and `ret` are local variables. You should follow this convention when defining functions.

The following program uses the `maxelt()` function. It loads an array, calls `maxelt()`, and then reports the maximum number in that array:

```
function maxelt(vec,  i, ret)
{
    for (i in vec) {
        if (ret == "" || vec[i] > ret)
            ret = vec[i]
    }
    return ret
}
```

```

}

# Load all fields of each record into nums.
{
    for(i = 1; i <= NF; i++)
        nums[NR, i] = $i
}

END {
    print maxelt(nums)
}

```

Given the following input:

```

1 5 23 8 16
44 3 5 2 8 26
256 291 1396 2962 100
-6 467 998 1101
99385 11 0 225

```

the program reports (predictably) that 99,385 is the largest value in the array.

### 9.2.5 Functions and Their Effects on Variable Typing

`awk` is a very fluid language. It is possible that `awk` can't tell if an identifier represents a scalar variable or an array until runtime. Here is an annotated sample program:

```

function foo(a)
{
    a[1] = 1    # parameter is an array
}

BEGIN {
    b = 1
    foo(b)    # invalid: fatal type mismatch

    foo(x)    # x uninitialized, becomes an array dynamically
    x = 1     # now not allowed, runtime error
}

```

Usually, such things aren't a big issue, but it's worth being aware of them.

## 9.3 Indirect Function Calls

This section describes a `gawk`-specific extension.

Often, you may wish to defer the choice of function to call until runtime. For example, you may have different kinds of records, each of which should be processed differently.

Normally, you would have to use a series of `if-else` statements to decide which function to call. By using *indirect* function calls, you can specify the name of the function to call as a string variable, and then call the function. Let's look at an example.

Suppose you have a file with your test scores for the classes you are taking. The first field is the class name. The following fields are the functions to call to process the data, up

to a “marker” field ‘data:’. Following the marker, to the end of the record, are the various numeric test scores.

Here is the initial file; you wish to get the sum and the average of your test scores:

```
Biology_101 sum average data: 87.0 92.4 78.5 94.9
Chemistry_305 sum average data: 75.2 98.3 94.7 88.2
English_401 sum average data: 100.0 95.6 87.1 93.4
```

To process the data, you might write initially:

```
{
  class = $1
  for (i = 2; $i != "data:; i++) {
    if ($i == "sum")
      sum()    # processes the whole record
    else if ($i == "average")
      average()
    ...      # and so on
  }
}
```

This style of programming works, but can be awkward. With *indirect* function calls, you tell `gawk` to use the *value* of a variable as the name of the function to call.

The syntax is similar to that of a regular function call: an identifier immediately followed by a left parenthesis, any arguments, and then a closing right parenthesis, with the addition of a leading ‘@’ character:

```
the_func = "sum"
result = @the_func()  # calls the ‘sum’ function
```

Here is a full program that processes the previously shown data, using indirect function calls.

```
# indirectcall.awk --- Demonstrate indirect function calls

# average --- return the average of the values in fields $first - $last

function average(first, last, sum, i)
{
  sum = 0;
  for (i = first; i <= last; i++)
    sum += $i

  return sum / (last - first + 1)
}

# sum --- return the sum of the values in fields $first - $last

function sum(first, last, ret, i)
{
  ret = 0;
  for (i = first; i <= last; i++)
```

```

        ret += $i

    return ret
}

```

These two functions expect to work on fields; thus the parameters `first` and `last` indicate where in the fields to start and end. Otherwise they perform the expected computations and are not unusual.

```

# For each record, print the class name and the requested statistics

{
    class_name = $1
    gsub(/_/ , " ", class_name) # Replace _ with spaces

    # find start
    for (i = 1; i <= NF; i++) {
        if ($i == "data:") {
            start = i + 1
            break
        }
    }

    printf("%s:\n", class_name)
    for (i = 2; $i != "data:"; i++) {
        the_function = $i
        printf("\t%s: <%s>\n", $i, @the_function(start, NF) "")
    }
    print ""
}

```

This is the main processing for each record. It prints the class name (with underscores replaced with spaces). It then finds the start of the actual data, saving it in `start`. The last part of the code loops through each function name (from `$2` up to the marker, `'data:'`), calling the function named by the field. The indirect function call itself occurs as a parameter in the call to `printf`. (The `printf` format string uses `'%s'` as the format specifier so that we can use functions that return strings, as well as numbers. Note that the result from the indirect call is concatenated with the empty string, in order to force it to be a string value.)

Here is the result of running the program:

```

$ gawk -f indirectcall.awk class_data1
+ Biology 101:
+   sum: <352.8>
+   average: <88.2>
+
+ Chemistry 305:
+   sum: <356.4>
+   average: <89.1>
+

```

```

-| English 401:
-|     sum: <376.1>
-|     average: <94.025>

```

The ability to use indirect function calls is more powerful than you may think at first. The C and C++ languages provide “function pointers,” which are a mechanism for calling a function chosen at runtime. One of the most well-known uses of this ability is the C `qsort()` function, which sorts an array using the famous “quick sort” algorithm (see [the Wikipedia article](#) for more information). To use this function, you supply a pointer to a comparison function. This mechanism allows you to sort arbitrary data in an arbitrary fashion.

We can do something similar using `gawk`, like this:

```

# quicksort.awk --- Quicksort algorithm, with user-supplied
#                   comparison function
# quicksort --- C.A.R. Hoare's quick sort algorithm. See Wikipedia
#                   or almost any algorithms or computer science text

function quicksort(data, left, right, less_than,    i, last)
{
    if (left >= right) # do nothing if array contains fewer
        return        # than two elements

    quicksort_swap(data, left, int((left + right) / 2))
    last = left
    for (i = left + 1; i <= right; i++)
        if (@less_than(data[i], data[left]))
            quicksort_swap(data, ++last, i)
    quicksort_swap(data, left, last)
    quicksort(data, left, last - 1, less_than)
    quicksort(data, last + 1, right, less_than)
}

# quicksort_swap --- helper function for quicksort, should really be inline

function quicksort_swap(data, i, j, temp)
{
    temp = data[i]
    data[i] = data[j]
    data[j] = temp
}

```

The `quicksort()` function receives the `data` array, the starting and ending indices to sort (`left` and `right`), and the name of a function that performs a “less than” comparison. It then implements the quick sort algorithm.

To make use of the sorting function, we return to our previous example. The first thing to do is write some comparison functions:

```

# num_lt --- do a numeric less than comparison

```

```

function num_lt(left, right)
{
    return ((left + 0) < (right + 0))
}

# num_ge --- do a numeric greater than or equal to comparison

function num_ge(left, right)
{
    return ((left + 0) >= (right + 0))
}

```

The `num_ge()` function is needed to perform a descending sort; when used to perform a “less than” test, it actually does the opposite (greater than or equal to), which yields data sorted in descending order.

Next comes a sorting function. It is parameterized with the starting and ending field numbers and the comparison function. It builds an array with the data and calls `quicksort` appropriately, and then formats the results as a single string:

```

# do_sort --- sort the data according to 'compare'
#             and return it as a string

function do_sort(first, last, compare,      data, i, retval)
{
    delete data
    for (i = 1; first <= last; first++) {
        data[i] = $first
        i++
    }

    quicksort(data, 1, i-1, compare)

    retval = data[1]
    for (i = 2; i in data; i++)
        retval = retval " " data[i]

    return retval
}

```

Finally, the two sorting functions call `do_sort()`, passing in the names of the two comparison functions:

```

# sort --- sort the data in ascending order and return it as a string

function sort(first, last)
{
    return do_sort(first, last, "num_lt")
}

```

```
# rsort --- sort the data in descending order and return it as a string

function rsort(first, last)
{
    return do_sort(first, last, "num_ge")
}
```

Here is an extended version of the data file:

```
Biology_101 sum average sort rsort data: 87.0 92.4 78.5 94.9
Chemistry_305 sum average sort rsort data: 75.2 98.3 94.7 88.2
English_401 sum average sort rsort data: 100.0 95.6 87.1 93.4
```

Finally, here are the results when the enhanced program is run:

```
$ gawk -f quicksort.awk -f indirectcall.awk class_data2
+ Biology 101:
+   sum: <352.8>
+   average: <88.2>
+   sort: <78.5 87.0 92.4 94.9>
+   rsort: <94.9 92.4 87.0 78.5>
+
+ Chemistry 305:
+   sum: <356.4>
+   average: <89.1>
+   sort: <75.2 88.2 94.7 98.3>
+   rsort: <98.3 94.7 88.2 75.2>
+
+ English 401:
+   sum: <376.1>
+   average: <94.025>
+   sort: <87.1 93.4 95.6 100.0>
+   rsort: <100.0 95.6 93.4 87.1>
```

Remember that you must supply a leading ‘@’ in front of an indirect function call.

Unfortunately, indirect function calls cannot be used with the built-in functions. However, you can generally write “wrapper” functions which call the built-in ones, and those can be called indirectly. (Other than, perhaps, the mathematical functions, there is not a lot of reason to try to call the built-in functions indirectly.)

`gawk` does its best to make indirect function calls efficient. For example, in the following case:

```
for (i = 1; i <= n; i++)
    @the_func()
```

`gawk` will look up the actual function to call only once.



## 10 Internationalization with gawk

Once upon a time, computer makers wrote software that worked only in English. Eventually, hardware and software vendors noticed that if their systems worked in the native languages of non-English-speaking countries, they were able to sell more systems. As a result, internationalization and localization of programs and software systems became a common practice.

For many years, the ability to provide internationalization was largely restricted to programs written in C and C++. This chapter describes the underlying library `gawk` uses for internationalization, as well as how `gawk` makes internationalization features available at the `awk` program level. Having internationalization available at the `awk` level gives software developers additional flexibility—they are no longer forced to write in C or C++ when internationalization is a requirement.

### 10.1 Internationalization and Localization

*Internationalization* means writing (or modifying) a program once, in such a way that it can use multiple languages without requiring further source-code changes. *Localization* means providing the data necessary for an internationalized program to work in a particular language. Most typically, these terms refer to features such as the language used for printing error messages, the language used to read responses, and information related to how numerical and monetary values are printed and read.

### 10.2 GNU `gettext`

The facilities in GNU `gettext` focus on messages; strings printed by a program, either directly or via formatting with `printf` or `sprintf`.<sup>1</sup>

When using GNU `gettext`, each application has its own *text domain*. This is a unique name, such as `'kplilot'` or `'gawk'`, that identifies the application. A complete application may have multiple components—programs written in C or C++, as well as scripts written in `sh` or `awk`. All of the components use the same text domain.

To make the discussion concrete, assume we're writing an application named `guide`. Internationalization consists of the following steps, in this order:

1. The programmer goes through the source for all of `guide`'s components and marks each string that is a candidate for translation. For example, "`'-F': option required`" is a good candidate for translation. A table with strings of option names is not (e.g., `gawk`'s `'--profile'` option should remain the same, no matter what the local language).
2. The programmer indicates the application's text domain ("`guide`") to the `gettext` library, by calling the `textdomain()` function.
3. Messages from the application are extracted from the source code and collected into a portable object template file (`'guide.pot'`), which lists the strings and their translations. The translations are initially empty. The original (usually English) messages serve as the key for lookup of the translations.

---

<sup>1</sup> For some operating systems, the `gawk` port doesn't support GNU `gettext`. Therefore, these features are not available if you are using one of those operating systems. Sorry.

4. For each language with a translator, ‘guide.pot’ is copied to a portable object file (.po) and translations are created and shipped with the application. For example, there might be a ‘fr.po’ for a French translation.
5. Each language’s ‘.po’ file is converted into a binary message object (‘.mo’) file. A message object file contains the original messages and their translations in a binary format that allows fast lookup of translations at runtime.
6. When `guide` is built and installed, the binary translation files are installed in a standard place.
7. For testing and development, it is possible to tell `gettext` to use ‘.mo’ files in a different directory than the standard one by using the `bindtextdomain()` function.
8. At runtime, `guide` looks up each string via a call to `gettext()`. The returned string is the translated string if available, or the original string if not.
9. If necessary, it is possible to access messages from a different text domain than the one belonging to the application, without having to switch the application’s default text domain back and forth.

In C (or C++), the string marking and dynamic translation lookup are accomplished by wrapping each string in a call to `gettext()`:

```
printf("%s", gettext("Don't Panic!\n"));
```

The tools that extract messages from source code pull out all strings enclosed in calls to `gettext()`.

The GNU `gettext` developers, recognizing that typing ‘`gettext(...)`’ over and over again is both painful and ugly to look at, use the macro ‘`_`’ (an underscore) to make things easier:

```
/* In the standard header file: */
#define _(str) gettext(str)

/* In the program text: */
printf("%s", _("Don't Panic!\n"));
```

This reduces the typing overhead to just three extra characters per string and is considerably easier to read as well.

There are locale *categories* for different types of locale-related information. The defined locale categories that `gettext` knows about are:

#### LC\_MESSAGES

Text messages. This is the default category for `gettext` operations, but it is possible to supply a different one explicitly, if necessary. (It is almost never necessary to supply a different category.)

#### LC\_COLLATE

Text-collation information; i.e., how different characters and/or groups of characters sort in a given language.

**LC\_CTYPE** Character-type information (alphabetic, digit, upper- or lowercase, and so on). This information is accessed via the POSIX character classes in regular expressions, such as `/[[[:alnum:]]/` (see [Section 3.3 \[Regular Expression Operators\]](#), page 40).

**LC\_MONETARY**

Monetary information, such as the currency symbol, and whether the symbol goes before or after a number.

**LC\_NUMERIC**

Numeric information, such as which characters to use for the decimal point and the thousands separator.<sup>2</sup>

**LC\_RESPONSE**

Response information, such as how “yes” and “no” appear in the local language, and possibly other information as well.

**LC\_TIME**

Time- and date-related information, such as 12- or 24-hour clock, month printed before or after the day in a date, local month abbreviations, and so on.

**LC\_ALL**

All of the above. (Not too useful in the context of `gettext`.)

### 10.3 Internationalizing awk Programs

`gawk` provides the following variables and functions for internationalization:

**TEXTDOMAIN**

This variable indicates the application’s text domain. For compatibility with GNU `gettext`, the default value is “messages”.

**\_"your message here"**

String constants marked with a leading underscore are candidates for translation at runtime. String constants without a leading underscore are not translated.

**dcgettext(*string* [, *domain* [, *category*]])**

Return the translation of *string* in text domain *domain* for locale category *category*. The default value for *domain* is the current value of `TEXTDOMAIN`. The default value for *category* is “LC\_MESSAGES”.

If you supply a value for *category*, it must be a string equal to one of the known locale categories described in the previous section. You must also supply a text domain. Use `TEXTDOMAIN` if you want to use the current domain.

**CAUTION:** The order of arguments to the `awk` version of the `dcgettext()` function is purposely different from the order for the C version. The `awk` version’s order was chosen to be simple and to allow for reasonable `awk`-style default arguments.

**dcngettext(*string1*, *string2*, *number* [, *domain* [, *category*]])**

Return the plural form used for *number* of the translation of *string1* and *string2* in text domain *domain* for locale category *category*. *string1* is the English singular variant of a message, and *string2* the English plural variant of the same message. The default value for *domain* is the current value of `TEXTDOMAIN`. The default value for *category* is “LC\_MESSAGES”.

The same remarks about argument order as for the `dcgettext()` function apply.

<sup>2</sup> Americans use a comma every three decimal places and a period for the decimal point, while many Europeans do exactly the opposite: 1,234.56 versus 1.234,56.

`bindtextdomain(directory [, domain])`

Change the directory in which `gettext` looks for `.mo` files, in case they will not or cannot be placed in the standard locations (e.g., during testing). Return the directory in which `domain` is “bound.”

The default `domain` is the value of `TEXTDOMAIN`. If `directory` is the null string (`""`), then `bindtextdomain()` returns the current binding for the given `domain`.

To use these facilities in your `awk` program, follow the steps outlined in the previous section, like so:

1. Set the variable `TEXTDOMAIN` to the text domain of your program. This is best done in a `BEGIN` rule (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114), or it can also be done via the `-v` command-line option (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25):

```
BEGIN {
    TEXTDOMAIN = "guide"
    ...
}
```

2. Mark all translatable strings with a leading underscore (`'_'`) character. It *must* be adjacent to the opening quote of the string. For example:

```
print _"hello, world"
x = _"you goofed"
printf(_"Number of users is %d\n", nusers)
```

3. If you are creating strings dynamically, you can still translate them, using the `dcgettext()` built-in function:

```
message = nusers " users logged in"
message = dcgettext(message, "adminprog")
print message
```

Here, the call to `dcgettext()` supplies a different text domain (`"adminprog"`) in which to find the message, but it uses the default `"LC_MESSAGES"` category.

4. During development, you might want to put the `.mo` file in a private directory for testing. This is done with the `bindtextdomain()` built-in function:

```
BEGIN {
    TEXTDOMAIN = "guide"    # our text domain
    if (Testing) {
        # where to find our files
        bindtextdomain("testdir")
        # joe is in charge of adminprog
        bindtextdomain("../joe/testdir", "adminprog")
    }
    ...
}
```

See [Section 10.5 \[A Simple Internationalization Example\]](#), page 191, for an example program showing the steps to create and use translations from `awk`.

## 10.4 Translating awk Programs

Once a program's translatable strings have been marked, they must be extracted to create the initial '.po' file. As part of translation, it is often helpful to rearrange the order in which arguments to `printf` are output.

`gawk`'s '--gen-pot' command-line option extracts the messages and is discussed next. After that, `printf`'s ability to rearrange the order for `printf` arguments at runtime is covered.

### 10.4.1 Extracting Marked Strings

Once your `awk` program is working, and all the strings have been marked and you've set (and perhaps bound) the text domain, it is time to produce translations. First, use the '--gen-pot' command-line option to create the initial '.pot' file:

```
$ gawk --gen-pot -f guide.awk > guide.pot
```

When run with '--gen-pot', `gawk` does not execute your program. Instead, it parses it as usual and prints all marked strings to standard output in the format of a GNU `gettext` Portable Object file. Also included in the output are any constant strings that appear as the first argument to `dcgettext()` or as the first and second argument to `dcngettext()`.<sup>3</sup> See Section 10.5 [A Simple Internationalization Example], page 191, for the full list of steps to go through to create and test translations for `guide`.

### 10.4.2 Rearranging printf Arguments

Format strings for `printf` and `sprintf()` (see Section 5.5 [Using `printf` Statements for Fancier Printing], page 76) present a special problem for translation. Consider the following:<sup>4</sup>

```
printf(_("String '%s' has %d characters\n",
        string, length(string)))
```

A possible German translation for this might be:

```
"%d Zeichen lang ist die Zeichenkette '%s'\n"
```

The problem should be obvious: the order of the format specifications is different from the original! Even though `gettext()` can return the translated string at runtime, it cannot change the argument order in the call to `printf`.

To solve this problem, `printf` format specifiers may have an additional optional element, which we call a *positional specifier*. For example:

```
"%2$d Zeichen lang ist die Zeichenkette '%1$s'\n"
```

Here, the positional specifier consists of an integer count, which indicates which argument to use, and a '\$'. Counts are one-based, and the format string itself is *not* included. Thus, in the following example, 'string' is the first argument and 'length(string)' is the second:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN {
>     string = "Dont Panic"
>     printf _"%2$d characters live in \"%1$s\"\n",
>           string, length(string)
```

<sup>3</sup> The `xgettext` utility that comes with GNU `gettext` can handle '.awk' files.

<sup>4</sup> This example is borrowed from the GNU `gettext` manual.

```
> }'
  └ 10 characters live in "Dont Panic"
```

If present, positional specifiers come first in the format specification, before the flags, the field width, and/or the precision.

Positional specifiers can be used with the dynamic field width and precision capability:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN {
>   printf("%*.*s\n", 10, 20, "hello")
>   printf("%3$*2$.*1$s\n", 20, 10, "hello")
> }'
  └      hello
  └      hello
```

**NOTE:** When using ‘\*’ with a positional specifier, the ‘\*’ comes first, then the integer position, and then the ‘\$’. This is somewhat counterintuitive.

**gawk** does not allow you to mix regular format specifiers and those with positional specifiers in the same string:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN { printf _"%d %3$s\n", 1, 2, "hi" }'
[error] gawk: cmd. line:1: fatal: must use 'count$' on all formats or none
```

**NOTE:** There are some pathological cases that **gawk** may fail to diagnose. In such cases, the output may not be what you expect. It’s still a bad idea to try mixing them, even if **gawk** doesn’t detect it.

Although positional specifiers can be used directly in **awk** programs, their primary purpose is to help in producing correct translations of format strings into languages different from the one in which the program is first written.

### 10.4.3 **awk** Portability Issues

**gawk**’s internationalization features were purposely chosen to have as little impact as possible on the portability of **awk** programs that use them to other versions of **awk**. Consider this program:

```
BEGIN {
  TEXTDOMAIN = "guide"
  if (Test_Guide) # set with -v
    bindtextdomain("/test/guide/messages")
  print _"don't panic!"
}
```

As written, it won’t work on other versions of **awk**. However, it is actually almost portable, requiring very little change:

- Assignments to `TEXTDOMAIN` won’t have any effect, since `TEXTDOMAIN` is not special in other **awk** implementations.
- Non-GNU versions of **awk** treat marked strings as the concatenation of a variable named `_` with the string following it.<sup>5</sup> Typically, the variable `_` has the null string (“”) as its value, leaving the original string constant as the result.

<sup>5</sup> This is good fodder for an “Obfuscated **awk**” contest.

- By defining “dummy” functions to replace `dcgettext()`, `dcngettext()` and `bindtextdomain()`, the `awk` program can be made to run, but all the messages are output in the original language. For example:

```
function bindtextdomain(dir, domain)
{
    return dir
}

function dcgettext(string, domain, category)
{
    return string
}

function dcngettext(string1, string2, number, domain, category)
{
    return (number == 1 ? string1 : string2)
}
```

- The use of positional specifications in `printf` or `sprintf()` is *not* portable. To support `gettext()` at the C level, many systems’ C versions of `sprintf()` do support positional specifiers. But it works only if enough arguments are supplied in the function call. Many versions of `awk` pass `printf` formats and arguments unchanged to the underlying C library version of `sprintf()`, but only one format and argument at a time. What happens if a positional specification is used is anybody’s guess. However, since the positional specifications are primarily for use in *translated* format strings, and since non-GNU `awks` never retrieve the translated string, this should not be a problem in practice.

## 10.5 A Simple Internationalization Example

Now let’s look at a step-by-step example of how to internationalize and localize a simple `awk` program, using ‘`guide.awk`’ as our original source:

```
BEGIN {
    TEXTDOMAIN = "guide"
    bindtextdomain(".") # for testing
    print _"Don't Panic"
    print _"The Answer Is", 42
    print "Pardon me, Zaphod who?"
}
```

Run ‘`gawk --gen-pot`’ to create the ‘`.pot`’ file:

```
$ gawk --gen-pot -f guide.awk > guide.pot
```

This produces:

```
#: guide.awk:4
msgid "Don't Panic"
msgstr ""

#: guide.awk:5
```

```
msgid "The Answer Is"
msgstr ""
```

This original portable object template file is saved and reused for each language into which the application is translated. The `msgid` is the original string and the `msgstr` is the translation.

**NOTE:** Strings not marked with a leading underscore do not appear in the ‘`guide.pot`’ file.

Next, the messages must be translated. Here is a translation to a hypothetical dialect of English, called “Mellow”:<sup>6</sup>

```
$ cp guide.pot guide-mellow.po
Add translations to guide-mellow.po ...
```

Following are the translations:

```
#: guide.awk:4
msgid "Don't Panic"
msgstr "Hey man, relax!"

#: guide.awk:5
msgid "The Answer Is"
msgstr "Like, the scoop is"
```

The next step is to make the directory to hold the binary message object file and then to create the ‘`guide.mo`’ file. The directory layout shown here is standard for GNU `gettext` on GNU/Linux systems. Other versions of `gettext` may use a different layout:

```
$ mkdir en_US en_US/LC_MESSAGES
```

The `msgfmt` utility does the conversion from human-readable ‘`.po`’ file to machine-readable ‘`.mo`’ file. By default, `msgfmt` creates a file named ‘`messages`’. This file must be renamed and placed in the proper directory so that `gawk` can find it:

```
$ msgfmt guide-mellow.po
$ mv messages en_US/LC_MESSAGES/guide.mo
```

Finally, we run the program to test it:

```
$ gawk -f guide.awk
+ Hey man, relax!
+ Like, the scoop is 42
+ Pardon me, Zaphod who?
```

If the three replacement functions for `dcgettext()`, `dcngettext()` and `bindtextdomain()` (see [Section 10.4.3 \[awk Portability Issues\], page 190](#)) are in a file named ‘`libintl.awk`’, then we can run ‘`guide.awk`’ unchanged as follows:

```
$ gawk --posix -f guide.awk -f libintl.awk
+ Don't Panic
+ The Answer Is 42
+ Pardon me, Zaphod who?
```

---

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it would be better if it were called “Hippy.” Ah, well.

## 10.6 gawk Can Speak Your Language

`gawk` itself has been internationalized using the GNU `gettext` package. (GNU `gettext` is described in complete detail in *GNU gettext tools*.) As of this writing, the latest version of GNU `gettext` is **version 0.18.1**.

If a translation of `gawk`'s messages exists, then `gawk` produces usage messages, warnings, and fatal errors in the local language.



## 11 Advanced Features of gawk

*Write documentation as if whoever reads it is a violent psychopath who knows where you live.*

Steve English, as quoted by Peter Langston

This chapter discusses advanced features in **gawk**. It's a bit of a “grab bag” of items that are otherwise unrelated to each other. First, a command-line option allows **gawk** to recognize nondecimal numbers in input data, not just in **awk** programs. Then, **gawk**'s special features for sorting arrays are presented. Next, two-way I/O, discussed briefly in earlier parts of this book, is described in full detail, along with the basics of TCP/IP networking. Finally, **gawk** can *profile* an **awk** program, making it possible to tune it for performance.

Section C.3 [Adding New Built-in Functions to **gawk**], page 328, discusses the ability to dynamically add new built-in functions to **gawk**. As this feature is still immature and likely to change, its description is relegated to an appendix.

### 11.1 Allowing Nondecimal Input Data

If you run **gawk** with the ‘`--non-decimal-data`’ option, you can have nondecimal constants in your input data:

```
$ echo 0123 123 0x123 |
> gawk --non-decimal-data '{ printf "%d, %d, %d\n",
>                               $1, $2, $3 }'
+ 83, 123, 291
```

For this feature to work, write your program so that **gawk** treats your data as numeric:

```
$ echo 0123 123 0x123 | gawk '{ print $1, $2, $3 }'
+ 0123 123 0x123
```

The **print** statement treats its expressions as strings. Although the fields can act as numbers when necessary, they are still strings, so **print** does not try to treat them numerically. You may need to add zero to a field to force it to be treated as a number. For example:

```
$ echo 0123 123 0x123 | gawk --non-decimal-data '
> { print $1, $2, $3
>   print $1 + 0, $2 + 0, $3 + 0 }'
+ 0123 123 0x123
+ 83 123 291
```

Because it is common to have decimal data with leading zeros, and because using this facility could lead to surprising results, the default is to leave it disabled. If you want it, you must explicitly request it.

**CAUTION:** *Use of this option is not recommended.* It can break old programs very badly. Instead, use the **strtonum()** function to convert your data (see Section 6.1.1.2 [Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers], page 89). This makes your programs easier to write and easier to read, and leads to less surprising results.

## 11.2 Controlling Array Traversal and Array Sorting

`gawk` lets you control the order in which ‘`for (i in array)`’ loops will traverse an array.

In addition, two built-in functions, `asort()` and `asorti()`, let you sort arrays based on the array values and indices, respectively. These two functions also provide control over the sorting criteria used to order the elements during sorting.

### 11.2.1 Controlling Array Traversal

By default, the order in which a ‘`for (i in array)`’ loop scans an array is not defined; it is generally based upon the internal implementation of arrays inside `awk`.

Often, though, it is desirable to be able to loop over the elements in a particular order that you, the programmer, choose. `gawk` lets you do this; this subsection describes how.

#### 11.2.1.1 Array Scanning Using A User-defined Function

The value of `PROCINFO["sorted_in"]` can be a function name. This lets you traverse an array based on any custom criterion. The array elements are ordered according to the return value of this function. The comparison function should be defined with at least four arguments:

```
function comp_func(i1, v1, i2, v2)
{
    compare elements 1 and 2 in some fashion
    return < 0; 0; or > 0
}
```

Here, *i1* and *i2* are the indices, and *v1* and *v2* are the corresponding values of the two elements being compared. Either *v1* or *v2*, or both, can be arrays if the array being traversed contains subarrays as values. The three possible return values are interpreted this way:

```
comp_func(i1, v1, i2, v2) < 0
    Index i1 comes before index i2 during loop traversal.
```

```
comp_func(i1, v1, i2, v2) == 0
    Indices i1 and i2 come together but the relative order with respect to each other
    is undefined.
```

```
comp_func(i1, v1, i2, v2) > 0
    Index i1 comes after index i2 during loop traversal.
```

Our first comparison function can be used to scan an array in numerical order of the indices:

```
function cmp_num_idx(i1, v1, i2, v2)
{
    # numerical index comparison, ascending order
    return (i1 - i2)
}
```

Our second function traverses an array based on the string order of the element values rather than by indices:

```
function cmp_str_val(i1, v1, i2, v2)
{
    # string value comparison, ascending order
    v1 = v1 ""
    v2 = v2 ""
    if (v1 < v2)
        return -1
    return (v1 != v2)
}
```

The third comparison function makes all numbers, and numeric strings without any leading or trailing spaces, come out first during loop traversal:

```
function cmp_num_str_val(i1, v1, i2, v2, n1, n2)
{
    # numbers before string value comparison, ascending order
    n1 = v1 + 0
    n2 = v2 + 0
    if (n1 == v1)
        return (n2 == v2) ? (n1 - n2) : -1
    else if (n2 == v2)
        return 1
    return (v1 < v2) ? -1 : (v1 != v2)
}
```

Here is a main program to demonstrate how gawk behaves using each of the previous functions:

```
BEGIN {
    data["one"] = 10
    data["two"] = 20
    data[10] = "one"
    data[100] = 100
    data[20] = "two"

    f[1] = "cmp_num_idx"
    f[2] = "cmp_str_val"
    f[3] = "cmp_num_str_val"
    for (i = 1; i <= 3; i++) {
        printf("Sort function: %s\n", f[i])
        PROCINFO["sorted_in"] = f[i]
        for (j in data)
            printf("\tdata[%s] = %s\n", j, data[j])
        print ""
    }
}
```

Here are the results when the program is run:

```

$ gawk -f compdemo.awk
+ Sort function: cmp_num_idx           Sort by numeric index
+   data[two] = 20
+   data[one] = 10                     Both strings are numerically zero
+   data[10] = one
+   data[20] = two
+   data[100] = 100
+
+ Sort function: cmp_str_val           Sort by element values as strings
+   data[one] = 10
+   data[100] = 100                    String 100 is less than string 20
+   data[two] = 20
+   data[10] = one
+   data[20] = two
+
+ Sort function: cmp_num_str_val       Sort all numbers before all strings
+   data[one] = 10
+   data[two] = 20
+   data[100] = 100
+   data[10] = one
+   data[20] = two

```

Consider sorting the entries of a GNU/Linux system password file according to login names. The following program sorts records by a specific field position and can be used for this purpose:

```

# sort.awk --- simple program to sort by field position
# field position is specified by the global variable POS

function cmp_field(i1, v1, i2, v2)
{
    # comparison by value, as string, and ascending order
    return v1[POS] < v2[POS] ? -1 : (v1[POS] != v2[POS])
}

{
    for (i = 1; i <= NF; i++)
        a[NR][i] = $i
}

END {
    PROCINFO["sorted_in"] = "cmp_field"
    if (POS < 1 || POS > NF)
        POS = 1
    for (i in a) {
        for (j = 1; j <= NF; j++)
            printf("%s%c", a[i][j], j < NF ? ":" : "")
        print ""
    }
}

```

```
    }
}
```

The first field in each entry of the password file is the user's login name, and the fields are separated by colons. Each record defines a subarray (see [Section 8.6 \[Arrays of Arrays\], page 144](#)), with each field as an element in the subarray. Running the program produces the following output:

```
$ gawk -vPOS=1 -F: -f sort.awk /etc/passwd
+ adm:x:3:4:adm:/var/adm:/sbin/nologin
+ apache:x:48:48:Apache:/var/www:/sbin/nologin
+ avahi:x:70:70:Avahi daemon:/:/sbin/nologin
...
```

The comparison should normally always return the same value when given a specific pair of array elements as its arguments. If inconsistent results are returned then the order is undefined. This behavior can be exploited to introduce random order into otherwise seemingly ordered data:

```
function cmp_randomize(i1, v1, i2, v2)
{
    # random order
    return (2 - 4 * rand())
}
```

As mentioned above, the order of the indices is arbitrary if two elements compare equal. This is usually not a problem, but letting the tied elements come out in arbitrary order can be an issue, especially when comparing item values. The partial ordering of the equal elements may change during the next loop traversal, if other elements are added or removed from the array. One way to resolve ties when comparing elements with otherwise equal values is to include the indices in the comparison rules. Note that doing this may make the loop traversal less efficient, so consider it only if necessary. The following comparison functions force a deterministic order, and are based on the fact that the indices of two elements are never equal:

```
function cmp_numeric(i1, v1, i2, v2)
{
    # numerical value (and index) comparison, descending order
    return (v1 != v2) ? (v2 - v1) : (i2 - i1)
}

function cmp_string(i1, v1, i2, v2)
{
    # string value (and index) comparison, descending order
    v1 = v1 i1
    v2 = v2 i2
    return (v1 > v2) ? -1 : (v1 != v2)
}
```

A custom comparison function can often simplify ordered loop traversal, and the sky is really the limit when it comes to designing such a function.

When string comparisons are made during a sort, either for element values where one or both aren't numbers, or for element indices handled as strings, the value of `IGNORECASE` (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126) controls whether the comparisons treat corresponding uppercase and lowercase letters as equivalent or distinct.

Another point to keep in mind is that in the case of subarrays the element values can themselves be arrays; a production comparison function should use the `isarray()` function (see [Section 9.1.7 \[Getting Type Information\]](#), page 170), to check for this, and choose a defined sorting order for subarrays.

All sorting based on `PROCINFO["sorted_in"]` is disabled in POSIX mode, since the `PROCINFO` array is not special in that case.

As a side note, sorting the array indices before traversing the array has been reported to add 15% to 20% overhead to the execution time of `awk` programs. For this reason, sorted array traversal is not the default.

### 11.2.1.2 Controlling Array Scanning Order

As described in the previous subsection, you can provide the name of a function as the value of `PROCINFO["sorted_in"]` to specify custom sorting criteria.

Often, though, you may wish to do something simple, such as “sort based on comparing the indices in ascending order,” or “sort based on comparing the values in descending order.” Having to write a simple comparison function for this purpose for use in all of your programs becomes tedious. For the common simple cases, `gawk` provides the option of supplying special names that do the requested sorting for you. You can think of them as “predefined” sorting functions, if you like, although the names purposely include characters that are not valid in real `awk` function names.

The following special values are available:

`"@ind_str_asc"`

Order by indices compared as strings; this is the most basic sort. (Internally, array indices are always strings, so with `'a[2*5] = 1'` the index is `"10"` rather than numeric 10.)

`"@ind_num_asc"`

Order by indices but force them to be treated as numbers in the process. Any index with a non-numeric value will end up positioned as if it were zero.

`"@val_type_asc"`

Order by element values rather than indices. Ordering is by the type assigned to the element (see [Section 6.3.2 \[Variable Typing and Comparison Expressions\]](#), page 102). All numeric values come before all string values, which in turn come before all subarrays.

`"@val_str_asc"`

Order by element values rather than by indices. Scalar values are compared as strings. Subarrays, if present, come out last.

`"@val_num_asc"`

Order by element values rather than by indices. Scalar values are compared as numbers. Subarrays, if present, come out last. When numeric values are equal,

the string values are used to provide an ordering: this guarantees consistent results across different versions of the C `qsort()` function.<sup>1</sup>

```
"@ind_str_desc"
    Reverse order from the most basic sort.

"@ind_num_desc"
    Numeric indices ordered from high to low.

"@val_type_desc"
    Element values, based on type, in descending order.

"@val_str_desc"
    Element values, treated as strings, ordered from high to low. Subarrays, if
    present, come out first.

"@val_num_desc"
    Element values, treated as numbers, ordered from high to low. Subarrays, if
    present, come out first.

"@unsorted"
    Array elements are processed in arbitrary order, which is the normal awk be-
    havior. You can also get the normal behavior by just deleting the "sorted_in"
    element from the PROCINFO array, if it previously had a value assigned to it.
```

The array traversal order is determined before the `for` loop starts to run. Changing `PROCINFO["sorted_in"]` in the loop body will not affect the loop.

For example:

```
$ gawk 'BEGIN {
>   a[4] = 4
>   a[3] = 3
>   for (i in a)
>       print i, a[i]
> }'
+ 4 4
+ 3 3
$ gawk 'BEGIN {
>   PROCINFO["sorted_in"] = "@str_ind_asc"
>   a[4] = 4
>   a[3] = 3
>   for (i in a)
>       print i, a[i]
> }'
+ 3 3
+ 4 4
```

When sorting an array by element values, if a value happens to be a subarray then it is considered to be greater than any string or numeric value, regardless of what the subarray

---

<sup>1</sup> When two elements compare as equal, the C `qsort()` function does not guarantee that they will maintain their original relative order after sorting. Using the string value to provide a unique ordering when the numeric values are equal ensures that `gawk` behaves consistently across different environments.

itself contains, and all subarrays are treated as being equal to each other. Their order relative to each other is determined by their index strings.

### 11.2.2 Sorting Array Values and Indices with `gawk`

In most `awk` implementations, sorting an array requires writing a `sort` function. While this can be educational for exploring different sorting algorithms, usually that's not the point of the program. `gawk` provides the built-in `asort()` and `asorti()` functions (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149) for sorting arrays. For example:

```
populate the array data
n = asort(data)
for (i = 1; i <= n; i++)
    do something with data[i]
```

After the call to `asort()`, the array `data` is indexed from 1 to some number `n`, the total number of elements in `data`. (This count is `asort()`'s return value.) `data[1] ≤ data[2] ≤ data[3]`, and so on. The array elements are compared as strings.

An important side effect of calling `asort()` is that *the array's original indices are irrevocably lost*. As this isn't always desirable, `asort()` accepts a second argument:

```
populate the array source
n = asort(source, dest)
for (i = 1; i <= n; i++)
    do something with dest[i]
```

In this case, `gawk` copies the `source` array into the `dest` array and then sorts `dest`, destroying its indices. However, the `source` array is not affected.

`asort()` accepts a third string argument to control comparison of array elements. As with `PROCINFO["sorted_in"]`, this argument may be the name of a user-defined function, or one of the predefined names that `gawk` provides (see [Section 11.2.1.1 \[Array Scanning Using A User-defined Function\]](#), page 196).

**NOTE:** In all cases, the sorted element values consist of the original array's element values. The ability to control comparison merely affects the way in which they are sorted.

Often, what's needed is to sort on the values of the *indices* instead of the values of the elements. To do that, use the `asorti()` function. The interface is identical to that of `asort()`, except that the index values are used for sorting, and become the values of the result array:

```
{ source[$0] = some_func($0) }

END {
    n = asorti(source, dest)
    for (i = 1; i <= n; i++) {
        Work with sorted indices directly:
        do something with dest[i]
        ...
        Access original array via sorted indices:
        do something with source[dest[i]]
    }
}
```

```
}

```

Similar to `asort()`, in all cases, the sorted element values consist of the original array's indices. The ability to control comparison merely affects the way in which they are sorted.

Sorting the array by replacing the indices provides maximal flexibility. To traverse the elements in decreasing order, use a loop that goes from  $n$  down to 1, either over the elements or over the indices.<sup>2</sup>

Copying array indices and elements isn't expensive in terms of memory. Internally, `gawk` maintains *reference counts* to data. For example, when `asort()` copies the first array to the second one, there is only one copy of the original array elements' data, even though both arrays use the values.

Because `IGNORECASE` affects string comparisons, the value of `IGNORECASE` also affects sorting for both `asort()` and `asorti()`. Note also that the locale's sorting order does *not* come into play; comparisons are based on character values only.<sup>3</sup> *Caveat Emptor*.

### 11.3 Two-Way Communications with Another Process

```
From: brennan@whidbey.com (Mike Brennan)
Newsgroups: comp.lang.awk
Subject: Re: Learn the SECRET to Attract Women Easily
Date: 4 Aug 1997 17:34:46 GMT
Message-ID: <5s53rm$eca@news.whidbey.com>
```

```
On 3 Aug 1997 13:17:43 GMT, Want More Dates???
<tracy78@kilgrona.com> wrote:
>Learn the SECRET to Attract Women Easily
>
>The SCENT(tm) Pheromone Sex Attractant For Men to Attract Women
```

```
The scent of awk programmers is a lot more attractive to women than
the scent of perl programmers.
```

```
--
Mike Brennan
```

It is often useful to be able to send data to a separate program for processing and then read the result. This can always be done with temporary files:

```
# Write the data for processing
tempfile = ("mydata." PROCINFO["pid"])
while (not done with data)
    print data | ("subprogram > " tempfile)
close("subprogram > " tempfile)

# Read the results, remove tempfile when done
while ((getline newdata < tempfile) > 0)
    process newdata appropriately
close(tempfile)
system("rm " tempfile)
```

<sup>2</sup> You may also use one of the predefined sorting names that sorts in decreasing order.

<sup>3</sup> This is true because locale-based comparison occurs only when in POSIX compatibility mode, and since `asort()` and `asorti()` are `gawk` extensions, they are not available in that case.

This works, but not elegantly. Among other things, it requires that the program be run in a directory that cannot be shared among users; for example, `/tmp` will not do, as another user might happen to be using a temporary file with the same name.

However, with `gawk`, it is possible to open a *two-way* pipe to another process. The second process is termed a *coprocess*, since it runs in parallel with `gawk`. The two-way connection is created using the `|&` operator (borrowed from the Korn shell, `ksh`):<sup>4</sup>

```
do {
    print data |& "subprogram"
    "subprogram" |& getline results
} while (data left to process)
close("subprogram")
```

The first time an I/O operation is executed using the `|&` operator, `gawk` creates a two-way pipeline to a child process that runs the other program. Output created with `print` or `printf` is written to the program's standard input, and output from the program's standard output can be read by the `gawk` program using `getline`. As is the case with processes started by `|`, the subprogram can be any program, or pipeline of programs, that can be started by the shell.

There are some cautionary items to be aware of:

- As the code inside `gawk` currently stands, the coprocess's standard error goes to the same place that the parent `gawk`'s standard error goes. It is not possible to read the child's standard error separately.
- I/O buffering may be a problem. `gawk` automatically flushes all output down the pipe to the coprocess. However, if the coprocess does not flush its output, `gawk` may hang when doing a `getline` in order to read the coprocess's results. This could lead to a situation known as *deadlock*, where each process is waiting for the other one to do something.

It is possible to close just one end of the two-way pipe to a coprocess, by supplying a second argument to the `close()` function of either `"to"` or `"from"` (see [Section 5.8 \[Closing Input and Output Redirections\]](#), page 86). These strings tell `gawk` to close the end of the pipe that sends data to the coprocess or the end that reads from it, respectively.

This is particularly necessary in order to use the system `sort` utility as part of a coprocess; `sort` must read *all* of its input data before it can produce any output. The `sort` program does not receive an end-of-file indication until `gawk` closes the write end of the pipe.

When you have finished writing data to the `sort` utility, you can close the `"to"` end of the pipe, and then start reading sorted data via `getline`. For example:

```
BEGIN {
    command = "LC_ALL=C sort"
    n = split("abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxy", a, "")

    for (i = n; i > 0; i--)
        print a[i] |& command
    close(command, "to")
```

---

<sup>4</sup> This is very different from the same operator in the C shell.

```

    while ((command |& getline line) > 0)
        print "got", line
    close(command)
}

```

This program writes the letters of the alphabet in reverse order, one per line, down the two-way pipe to `sort`. It then closes the write end of the pipe, so that `sort` receives an end-of-file indication. This causes `sort` to sort the data and write the sorted data back to the `gawk` program. Once all of the data has been read, `gawk` terminates the coprocess and exits.

As a side note, the assignment ‘`LC_ALL=C`’ in the `sort` command ensures traditional Unix (ASCII) sorting from `sort`.

You may also use pseudo-ttys (ptys) for two-way communication instead of pipes, if your system supports them. This is done on a per-command basis, by setting a special element in the `PROCINFO` array (see [Section 7.5.2 \[Built-in Variables That Convey Information\]](#), page 129), like so:

```

command = "sort -nr"           # command, save in convenience variable
PROCINFO[command, "pty"] = 1  # update PROCINFO
print ... |& command          # start two-way pipe
...

```

Using ptys avoids the buffer deadlock issues described earlier, at some loss in performance. If your system does not have ptys, or if all the system’s ptys are in use, `gawk` automatically falls back to using regular pipes.

## 11.4 Using gawk for Network Programming

EMISTERED:

*A host is a host from coast to coast,  
and no-one can talk to host that’s close,  
unless the host that isn’t close  
is busy hung or dead.*

In addition to being able to open a two-way pipeline to a coprocess on the same system (see [Section 11.3 \[Two-Way Communications with Another Process\]](#), page 203), it is possible to make a two-way connection to another process on another system across an IP network connection.

You can think of this as just a *very long* two-way pipeline to a coprocess. The way `gawk` decides that you want to use TCP/IP networking is by recognizing special file names that begin with one of ‘`/inet/`’, ‘`/inet4/`’ or ‘`/inet6/`’.

The full syntax of the special file name is ‘`/net-type/protocol/local-port/remote-host/remote-port`’. The components are:

*net-type* Specifies the kind of Internet connection to make. Use ‘`/inet4/`’ to force IPv4, and ‘`/inet6/`’ to force IPv6. Plain ‘`/inet/`’ (which used to be the only option) uses the system default, most likely IPv4.

*protocol* The protocol to use over IP. This must be either ‘tcp’, or ‘udp’, for a TCP or UDP IP connection, respectively. The use of TCP is recommended for most applications.

*local-port* The local TCP or UDP port number to use. Use a port number of ‘0’ when you want the system to pick a port. This is what you should do when writing a TCP or UDP client. You may also use a well-known service name, such as ‘smtp’ or ‘http’, in which case **gawk** attempts to determine the predefined port number using the C `getaddrinfo()` function.

*remote-host* The IP address or fully-qualified domain name of the Internet host to which you want to connect.

*remote-port* The TCP or UDP port number to use on the given *remote-host*. Again, use ‘0’ if you don’t care, or else a well-known service name.

**NOTE:** Failure in opening a two-way socket will result in a non-fatal error being returned to the calling code. The value of `ERRNO` indicates the error (see [Section 7.5.2 \[Built-in Variables That Convey Information\], page 129](#)).

Consider the following very simple example:

```
BEGIN {
    Service = "/inet/tcp/0/localhost/daytime"
    Service |& getline
    print $0
    close(Service)
}
```

This program reads the current date and time from the local system’s TCP ‘daytime’ server. It then prints the results and closes the connection.

Because this topic is extensive, the use of **gawk** for TCP/IP programming is documented separately. See *TCP/IP Internetworking with gawk*, which comes as part of the **gawk** distribution, for a much more complete introduction and discussion, as well as extensive examples.

## 11.5 Profiling Your awk Programs

You may produce execution traces of your **awk** programs. This is done with a specially compiled version of **gawk**, called **pgawk** (“profiling **gawk**”).

**pgawk** is identical in every way to **gawk**, except that when it has finished running, it creates a profile of your program in a file named ‘awkprof.out’. Because it is profiling, it also executes up to 45% slower than **gawk** normally does.

As shown in the following example, the ‘--profile’ option can be used to change the name of the file where **pgawk** will write the profile:

```
pgawk --profile=myprog.prof -f myprog.awk data1 data2
```

In the above example, **pgawk** places the profile in ‘myprog.prof’ instead of in ‘awkprof.out’.

Here is a sample session showing a simple **awk** program, its input data, and the results from running **pgawk**. First, the **awk** program:

```

BEGIN { print "First BEGIN rule" }

END { print "First END rule" }

/foo/ {
    print "matched /foo/, gosh"
    for (i = 1; i <= 3; i++)
        sing()
}

{
    if (/foo/)
        print "if is true"
    else
        print "else is true"
}

BEGIN { print "Second BEGIN rule" }

END { print "Second END rule" }

function sing(    dummy)
{
    print "I gotta be me!"
}

```

Following is the input data:

```

foo
bar
baz
foo
junk

```

Here is the 'awkprof.out' that results from running `pgawk` on this program and data (this example also illustrates that `awk` programmers sometimes have to work late):

```

# gawk profile, created Sun Aug 13 00:00:15 2000

# BEGIN block(s)

BEGIN {
1      print "First BEGIN rule"
1      print "Second BEGIN rule"
}

# Rule(s)

5 /foo/ { # 2
2      print "matched /foo/, gosh"

```

```

6         for (i = 1; i <= 3; i++) {
6             sing()
        }
    }

5 {
5     if (/foo/) { # 2
2         print "if is true"
3     } else {
3         print "else is true"
    }
}

# END block(s)

END {
1     print "First END rule"
1     print "Second END rule"
}

# Functions, listed alphabetically

6 function sing(dummy)
    {
6         print "I gotta be me!"
    }

```

This example illustrates many of the basic features of profiling output. They are as follows:

- The program is printed in the order `BEGIN` rule, `BEGINFILE` rule, pattern/action rules, `ENDFILE` rule, `END` rule and functions, listed alphabetically. Multiple `BEGIN` and `END` rules are merged together, as are multiple `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE` rules.
- Pattern-action rules have two counts. The first count, to the left of the rule, shows how many times the rule's pattern was *tested*. The second count, to the right of the rule's opening left brace in a comment, shows how many times the rule's action was *executed*. The difference between the two indicates how many times the rule's pattern evaluated to false.
- Similarly, the count for an `if-else` statement shows how many times the condition was tested. To the right of the opening left brace for the `if`'s body is a count showing how many times the condition was true. The count for the `else` indicates how many times the test failed.
- The count for a loop header (such as `for` or `while`) shows how many times the loop test was executed. (Because of this, you can't just look at the count on the first statement in a rule to determine how many times the rule was executed. If the first statement is a loop, the count is misleading.)
- For user-defined functions, the count next to the `function` keyword indicates how

many times the function was called. The counts next to the statements in the body show how many times those statements were executed.

- The layout uses “K&R” style with TABs. Braces are used everywhere, even when the body of an `if`, `else`, or loop is only a single statement.
- Parentheses are used only where needed, as indicated by the structure of the program and the precedence rules. For example, `(3 + 5) * 4` means add three plus five, then multiply the total by four. However, `3 + 5 * 4` has no parentheses, and means `3 + (5 * 4)`.
- Parentheses are used around the arguments to `print` and `printf` only when the `print` or `printf` statement is followed by a redirection. Similarly, if the target of a redirection isn't a scalar, it gets parenthesized.
- `pgawk` supplies leading comments in front of the `BEGIN` and `END` rules, the pattern/action rules, and the functions.

The profiled version of your program may not look exactly like what you typed when you wrote it. This is because `pgawk` creates the profiled version by “pretty printing” its internal representation of the program. The advantage to this is that `pgawk` can produce a standard representation. The disadvantage is that all source-code comments are lost, as are the distinctions among multiple `BEGIN`, `END`, `BEGINFILE`, and `ENDFILE` rules. Also, things such as:

```
/foo/
```

come out as:

```
/foo/ {
    print $0
}
```

which is correct, but possibly surprising.

Besides creating profiles when a program has completed, `pgawk` can produce a profile while it is running. This is useful if your `awk` program goes into an infinite loop and you want to see what has been executed. To use this feature, run `pgawk` in the background:

```
$ pgawk -f myprog &
[1] 13992
```

The shell prints a job number and process ID number; in this case, 13992. Use the `kill` command to send the `USR1` signal to `pgawk`:

```
$ kill -USR1 13992
```

As usual, the profiled version of the program is written to `'awkprof.out'`, or to a different file if you use the `'--profile'` option.

Along with the regular profile, as shown earlier, the profile includes a trace of any active functions:

```
# Function Call Stack:
```

```
# 3. baz
# 2. bar
# 1. foo
# -- main --
```

You may send `pgawk` the `USR1` signal as many times as you like. Each time, the profile and function call trace are appended to the output profile file.

If you use the `HUP` signal instead of the `USR1` signal, `pgawk` produces the profile and the function call trace and then exits.

When `pgawk` runs on MS-Windows systems, it uses the `INT` and `QUIT` signals for producing the profile and, in the case of the `INT` signal, `pgawk` exits. This is because these systems don't support the `kill` command, so the only signals you can deliver to a program are those generated by the keyboard. The `INT` signal is generated by the `Ctrl-C` or `Ctrl-BREAK` key, while the `QUIT` signal is generated by the `Ctrl-\` key.

Finally, regular `gawk` also accepts the `--profile` option. When called this way, `gawk` “pretty prints” the program into `awkprof.out`, without any execution counts.

## 12 A Library of awk Functions

Section 9.2 [User-Defined Functions], page 170, describes how to write your own `awk` functions. Writing functions is important, because it allows you to encapsulate algorithms and program tasks in a single place. It simplifies programming, making program development more manageable, and making programs more readable.

One valuable way to learn a new programming language is to *read* programs in that language. To that end, this chapter and Chapter 13 [Practical awk Programs], page 241, provide a good-sized body of code for you to read, and hopefully, to learn from.

This chapter presents a library of useful `awk` functions. Many of the sample programs presented later in this book use these functions. The functions are presented here in a progression from simple to complex.

Section 13.3.7 [Extracting Programs from Texinfo Source Files], page 271, presents a program that you can use to extract the source code for these example library functions and programs from the Texinfo source for this book. (This has already been done as part of the `gawk` distribution.)

If you have written one or more useful, general-purpose `awk` functions and would like to contribute them to the `awk` user community, see [How to Contribute], page 8, for more information.

The programs in this chapter and in Chapter 13 [Practical awk Programs], page 241, freely use features that are `gawk`-specific. Rewriting these programs for different implementations of `awk` is pretty straightforward.

- Diagnostic error messages are sent to `‘/dev/stderr’`. Use `‘| "cat 1>&2"’` instead of `‘> /dev/stderr"’` if your system does not have a `‘/dev/stderr’`, or if you cannot use `gawk`.
- A number of programs use `nextfile` (see Section 7.4.9 [Using `gawk`’s `nextfile` Statement], page 125) to skip any remaining input in the input file.
- Finally, some of the programs choose to ignore upper- and lowercase distinctions in their input. They do so by assigning one to `IGNORECASE`. You can achieve almost the same effect<sup>1</sup> by adding the following rule to the beginning of the program:

```
# ignore case
{ $0 = tolower($0) }
```

Also, verify that all `regexp` and string constants used in comparisons use only lowercase letters.

### 12.1 Naming Library Function Global Variables

Due to the way the `awk` language evolved, variables are either *global* (usable by the entire program) or *local* (usable just by a specific function). There is no intermediate state analogous to `static` variables in C.

Library functions often need to have global variables that they can use to preserve state information between calls to the function—for example, `getopt()`’s variable `_opti` (see

---

<sup>1</sup> The effects are not identical. Output of the transformed record will be in all lowercase, while `IGNORECASE` preserves the original contents of the input record.

Section 12.4 [Processing Command-Line Options], page 225). Such variables are called *private*, since the only functions that need to use them are the ones in the library.

When writing a library function, you should try to choose names for your private variables that will not conflict with any variables used by either another library function or a user's main program. For example, a name like `i` or `j` is not a good choice, because user programs often use variable names like these for their own purposes.

The example programs shown in this chapter all start the names of their private variables with an underscore (`'_'`). Users generally don't use leading underscores in their variable names, so this convention immediately decreases the chances that the variable name will be accidentally shared with the user's program.

In addition, several of the library functions use a prefix that helps indicate what function or set of functions use the variables—for example, `_pw_byname` in the user database routines (see Section 12.5 [Reading the User Database], page 230). This convention is recommended, since it even further decreases the chance of inadvertent conflict among variable names. Note that this convention is used equally well for variable names and for private function names.<sup>2</sup>

As a final note on variable naming, if a function makes global variables available for use by a main program, it is a good convention to start that variable's name with a capital letter—for example, `getopt()`'s `Opterr` and `Optind` variables (see Section 12.4 [Processing Command-Line Options], page 225). The leading capital letter indicates that it is global, while the fact that the variable name is not all capital letters indicates that the variable is not one of `awk`'s built-in variables, such as `FS`.

It is also important that *all* variables in library functions that do not need to save state are, in fact, declared `local`.<sup>3</sup> If this is not done, the variable could accidentally be used in the user's program, leading to bugs that are very difficult to track down:

```
function lib_func(x, y,    11, 12)
{
    ...
    use variable some_var    # some_var should be local
    ...                      # but is not by oversight
}
```

A different convention, common in the Tcl community, is to use a single associative array to hold the values needed by the library function(s), or “package.” This significantly decreases the number of actual global names in use. For example, the functions described in Section 12.5 [Reading the User Database], page 230, might have used array elements `PW_data["inited"]`, `PW_data["total"]`, `PW_data["count"]`, and `PW_data["awklib"]`, instead of `_pw_inited`, `_pw_awklib`, `_pw_total`, and `_pw_count`.

The conventions presented in this section are exactly that: conventions. You are not required to write your programs this way—we merely recommend that you do so.

## 12.2 General Programming

This section presents a number of functions that are of general programming use.

<sup>2</sup> While all the library routines could have been rewritten to use this convention, this was not done, in order to show how our own `awk` programming style has evolved and to provide some basis for this discussion.

<sup>3</sup> `gawk`'s `'--dump-variables'` command-line option is useful for verifying this.

### 12.2.1 Converting Strings To Numbers

The `strtonum()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149) is a gawk extension. The following function provides an implementation for other versions of awk:

```
# mystrtonum --- convert string to number

function mystrtonum(str,          ret, chars, n, i, k, c)
{
    if (str ~ /^0[0-7]*$/) {
        # octal
        n = length(str)
        ret = 0
        for (i = 1; i <= n; i++) {
            c = substr(str, i, 1)
            if ((k = index("01234567", c)) > 0)
                k-- # adjust for 1-basing in awk

            ret = ret * 8 + k
        }
    } else if (str ~ /^0[xX][[:xdigit:]]+$/) {
        # hexadecimal
        str = substr(str, 3) # lop off leading 0x
        n = length(str)
        ret = 0
        for (i = 1; i <= n; i++) {
            c = substr(str, i, 1)
            c = tolower(c)
            if ((k = index("0123456789", c)) > 0)
                k-- # adjust for 1-basing in awk
            else if ((k = index("abcdef", c)) > 0)
                k += 9

            ret = ret * 16 + k
        }
    } else if (str ~ \
/^[-+]?([0-9]+([.][0-9]*([Ee][0-9]+)?)|([.][0-9]+([Ee][-+]?[0-9]+)?))$/) {
        # decimal number, possibly floating point
        ret = str + 0
    } else
        ret = "NOT-A-NUMBER"

    return ret
}

# BEGIN {          # gawk test harness
#     a[1] = "25"
```

```

#   a[2] = ".31"
#   a[3] = "0123"
#   a[4] = "0xdeadBEEF"
#   a[5] = "123.45"
#   a[6] = "1.e3"
#   a[7] = "1.32"
#   a[7] = "1.32E2"
#
#   for (i = 1; i in a; i++)
#       print a[i], strtonum(a[i]), mystrtonum(a[i])
# }

```

The function first looks for C-style octal numbers (base 8). If the input string matches a regular expression describing octal numbers, then `mystrtonum()` loops through each character in the string. It sets `k` to the index in "01234567" of the current octal digit. Since the return value is one-based, the 'k--' adjusts `k` so it can be used in computing the return value.

Similar logic applies to the code that checks for and converts a hexadecimal value, which starts with '0x' or '0X'. The use of `tolower()` simplifies the computation for finding the correct numeric value for each hexadecimal digit.

Finally, if the string matches the (rather complicated) regexp for a regular decimal integer or floating-point number, the computation '`ret = str + 0`' lets `awk` convert the value to a number.

A commented-out test program is included, so that the function can be tested with `gawk` and the results compared to the built-in `strtonum()` function.

### 12.2.2 Assertions

When writing large programs, it is often useful to know that a condition or set of conditions is true. Before proceeding with a particular computation, you make a statement about what you believe to be the case. Such a statement is known as an *assertion*. The C language provides an `<assert.h>` header file and corresponding `assert()` macro that the programmer can use to make assertions. If an assertion fails, the `assert()` macro arranges to print a diagnostic message describing the condition that should have been true but was not, and then it kills the program. In C, using `assert()` looks this:

```

#include <assert.h>

int myfunc(int a, double b)
{
    assert(a <= 5 && b >= 17.1);
    ...
}

```

If the assertion fails, the program prints a message similar to this:

```

prog.c:5: assertion failed: a <= 5 && b >= 17.1

```

The C language makes it possible to turn the condition into a string for use in printing the diagnostic message. This is not possible in `awk`, so this `assert()` function also requires a string version of the condition that is being tested. Following is the function:

```

# assert --- assert that a condition is true. Otherwise exit.

function assert(condition, string)
{
    if (! condition) {
        printf("%s:%d: assertion failed: %s\n",
            FILENAME, FNR, string) > "/dev/stderr"
        _assert_exit = 1
        exit 1
    }
}

END {
    if (_assert_exit)
        exit 1
}

```

The `assert()` function tests the `condition` parameter. If it is false, it prints a message to standard error, using the `string` parameter to describe the failed condition. It then sets the variable `_assert_exit` to one and executes the `exit` statement. The `exit` statement jumps to the `END` rule. If the `END` rule finds `_assert_exit` to be true, it exits immediately.

The purpose of the test in the `END` rule is to keep any other `END` rules from running. When an assertion fails, the program should exit immediately. If no assertions fail, then `_assert_exit` is still false when the `END` rule is run normally, and the rest of the program's `END` rules execute. For all of this to work correctly, `'assert.awk'` must be the first source file read by `awk`. The function can be used in a program in the following way:

```

function myfunc(a, b)
{
    assert(a <= 5 && b >= 17.1, "a <= 5 && b >= 17.1")
    ...
}

```

If the assertion fails, you see a message similar to the following:

```
mydata:1357: assertion failed: a <= 5 && b >= 17.1
```

There is a small problem with this version of `assert()`. An `END` rule is automatically added to the program calling `assert()`. Normally, if a program consists of just a `BEGIN` rule, the input files and/or standard input are not read. However, now that the program has an `END` rule, `awk` attempts to read the input data files or standard input (see [Section 7.1.4.1 \[Startup and Cleanup Actions\], page 114](#)), most likely causing the program to hang as it waits for input.

There is a simple workaround to this: make sure that such a `BEGIN` rule always ends with an `exit` statement.

### 12.2.3 Rounding Numbers

The way `printf` and `sprintf()` (see [Section 5.5 \[Using printf Statements for Fancier Printing\], page 76](#)) perform rounding often depends upon the system's C `sprintf()` subroutine. On many machines, `sprintf()` rounding is “unbiased,” which means it doesn't

always round a trailing '.5' up, contrary to naive expectations. In unbiased rounding, '.5' rounds to even, rather than always up, so 1.5 rounds to 2 but 4.5 rounds to 4. This means that if you are using a format that does rounding (e.g., "%.0f"), you should check what your system does. The following function does traditional rounding; it might be useful if your `awk`'s `printf` does unbiased rounding:

```
# round.awk --- do normal rounding

function round(x, ival, aval, fraction)
{
    ival = int(x)    # integer part, int() truncates

    # see if fractional part
    if (ival == x)  # no fraction
        return ival # ensure no decimals

    if (x < 0) {
        aval = -x    # absolute value
        ival = int(aval)
        fraction = aval - ival
        if (fraction >= .5)
            return int(x) - 1 # -2.5 --> -3
        else
            return int(x)    # -2.3 --> -2
    } else {
        fraction = x - ival
        if (fraction >= .5)
            return ival + 1
        else
            return ival
    }
}

# test harness
{ print $0, round($0) }
```

### 12.2.4 The Cliff Random Number Generator

The **Cliff random number generator** is a very simple random number generator that “passes the noise sphere test for randomness by showing no structure.” It is easily programmed, in less than 10 lines of `awk` code:

```
# cliff_rand.awk --- generate Cliff random numbers

BEGIN { _cliff_seed = 0.1 }

function cliff_rand()
{
    _cliff_seed = (100 * log(_cliff_seed)) % 1
}
```

```

    if (_cliff_seed < 0)
        _cliff_seed = - _cliff_seed
    return _cliff_seed
}

```

This algorithm requires an initial “seed” of 0.1. Each new value uses the current seed as input for the calculation. If the built-in `rand()` function (see [Section 9.1.2 \[Numeric Functions\]](#), page 147) isn’t random enough, you might try using this function instead.

### 12.2.5 Translating Between Characters and Numbers

One commercial implementation of `awk` supplies a built-in function, `ord()`, which takes a character and returns the numeric value for that character in the machine’s character set. If the string passed to `ord()` has more than one character, only the first one is used.

The inverse of this function is `chr()` (from the function of the same name in Pascal), which takes a number and returns the corresponding character. Both functions are written very nicely in `awk`; there is no real reason to build them into the `awk` interpreter:

```

# ord.awk --- do ord and chr

# Global identifiers:
#   _ord_:      numerical values indexed by characters
#   _ord_init_: function to initialize _ord_

BEGIN    { _ord_init() }

function _ord_init(    low, high, i, t)
{
    low = sprintf("%c", 7) # BEL is ascii 7
    if (low == "\a") {    # regular ascii
        low = 0
        high = 127
    } else if (sprintf("%c", 128 + 7) == "\a") {
        # ascii, mark parity
        low = 128
        high = 255
    } else {            # ebcdic(!)
        low = 0
        high = 255
    }
}

for (i = low; i <= high; i++) {
    t = sprintf("%c", i)
    _ord_[t] = i
}
}

```

Some explanation of the numbers used by `chr` is worthwhile. The most prominent character set in use today is ASCII.<sup>4</sup> Although an 8-bit byte can hold 256 distinct values (from 0 to 255), ASCII only defines characters that use the values from 0 to 127.<sup>5</sup> In the now distant past, at least one minicomputer manufacturer used ASCII, but with mark parity, meaning that the leftmost bit in the byte is always 1. This means that on those systems, characters have numeric values from 128 to 255. Finally, large mainframe systems use the EBCDIC character set, which uses all 256 values. While there are other character sets in use on some older systems, they are not really worth worrying about:

```
function ord(str, c)
{
    # only first character is of interest
    c = substr(str, 1, 1)
    return _ord_[c]
}

function chr(c)
{
    # force c to be numeric by adding 0
    return sprintf("%c", c + 0)
}

#### test code ####
# BEGIN \
# {
#     for (;;) {
#         printf("enter a character: ")
#         if (getline var <= 0)
#             break
#         printf("ord(%s) = %d\n", var, ord(var))
#     }
# }
```

An obvious improvement to these functions is to move the code for the `_ord_init` function into the body of the `BEGIN` rule. It was written this way initially for ease of development. There is a “test program” in a `BEGIN` rule, to test the function. It is commented out for production use.

### 12.2.6 Merging an Array into a String

When doing string processing, it is often useful to be able to join all the strings in an array into one long string. The following function, `join()`, accomplishes this task. It is used later in several of the application programs (see [Chapter 13 \[Practical awk Programs\], page 241](#)).

<sup>4</sup> This is changing; many systems use Unicode, a very large character set that includes ASCII as a subset. On systems with full Unicode support, a character can occupy up to 32 bits, making simple tests such as used here prohibitively expensive.

<sup>5</sup> ASCII has been extended in many countries to use the values from 128 to 255 for country-specific characters. If your system uses these extensions, you can simplify `_ord_init` to loop from 0 to 255.

Good function design is important; this function needs to be general but it should also have a reasonable default behavior. It is called with an array as well as the beginning and ending indices of the elements in the array to be merged. This assumes that the array indices are numeric—a reasonable assumption since the array was likely created with `split()` (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149):

```
# join.awk --- join an array into a string

function join(array, start, end, sep, result, i)
{
    if (sep == "")
        sep = " "
    else if (sep == SUBSEP) # magic value
        sep = ""
    result = array[start]
    for (i = start + 1; i <= end; i++)
        result = result sep array[i]
    return result
}
```

An optional additional argument is the separator to use when joining the strings back together. If the caller supplies a nonempty value, `join()` uses it; if it is not supplied, it has a null value. In this case, `join()` uses a single space as a default separator for the strings. If the value is equal to `SUBSEP`, then `join()` joins the strings with no separator between them. `SUBSEP` serves as a “magic” value to indicate that there should be no separation between the component strings.<sup>6</sup>

### 12.2.7 Managing the Time of Day

The `systemtime()` and `strftime()` functions described in [Section 9.1.5 \[Time Functions\]](#), page 163, provide the minimum functionality necessary for dealing with the time of day in human readable form. While `strftime()` is extensive, the control formats are not necessarily easy to remember or intuitively obvious when reading a program.

The following function, `gettimeofday()`, populates a user-supplied array with preformatted time information. It returns a string with the current time formatted in the same way as the `date` utility:

```
# gettimeofday.awk --- get the time of day in a usable format

# Returns a string in the format of output of date(1)
# Populates the array argument time with individual values:
#   time["second"]      -- seconds (0 - 59)
#   time["minute"]     -- minutes (0 - 59)
#   time["hour"]       -- hours (0 - 23)
#   time["althour"]    -- hours (0 - 12)
#   time["monthday"]   -- day of month (1 - 31)
#   time["month"]      -- month of year (1 - 12)
```

<sup>6</sup> It would be nice if `awk` had an assignment operator for concatenation. The lack of an explicit operator for concatenation makes string operations more difficult than they really need to be.

```

#   time["monthname"]    -- name of the month
#   time["shortmonth"]  -- short name of the month
#   time["year"]        -- year modulo 100 (0 - 99)
#   time["fullyear"]    -- full year
#   time["weekday"]     -- day of week (Sunday = 0)
#   time["altweekday"]  -- day of week (Monday = 0)
#   time["dayname"]     -- name of weekday
#   time["shortdayname"] -- short name of weekday
#   time["yearday"]     -- day of year (0 - 365)
#   time["timezone"]    -- abbreviation of timezone name
#   time["ampm"]        -- AM or PM designation
#   time["weeknum"]     -- week number, Sunday first day
#   time["altweeknum"]  -- week number, Monday first day

```

```

function gettimeofday(time,   ret, now, i)
{
    # get time once, avoids unnecessary system calls
    now = systime()

    # return date(1)-style output
    ret = strftime("%a %b %e %H:%M:%S %Z %Y", now)

    # clear out target array
    delete time

    # fill in values, force numeric values to be
    # numeric by adding 0
    time["second"]    = strftime("%S", now) + 0
    time["minute"]    = strftime("%M", now) + 0
    time["hour"]      = strftime("%H", now) + 0
    time["althour"]   = strftime("%I", now) + 0
    time["monthday"]  = strftime("%d", now) + 0
    time["month"]     = strftime("%m", now) + 0
    time["monthname"] = strftime("%B", now)
    time["shortmonth"] = strftime("%b", now)
    time["year"]      = strftime("%y", now) + 0
    time["fullyear"]  = strftime("%Y", now) + 0
    time["weekday"]   = strftime("%w", now) + 0
    time["altweekday"] = strftime("%u", now) + 0
    time["dayname"]   = strftime("%A", now)
    time["shortdayname"] = strftime("%a", now)
    time["yearday"]   = strftime("%j", now) + 0
    time["timezone"]  = strftime("%Z", now)
    time["ampm"]      = strftime("%p", now)
    time["weeknum"]   = strftime("%U", now) + 0
    time["altweeknum"] = strftime("%W", now) + 0

```

```

    return ret
}

```

The string indices are easier to use and read than the various formats required by `strftime()`. The `alarm` program presented in [Section 13.3.2 \[An Alarm Clock Program\]](#), [page 262](#), uses this function. A more general design for the `gettimeofday()` function would have allowed the user to supply an optional timestamp value to use instead of the current time.

## 12.3 Data File Management

This section presents functions that are useful for managing command-line data files.

### 12.3.1 Noting Data File Boundaries

The `BEGIN` and `END` rules are each executed exactly once at the beginning and end of your `awk` program, respectively (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), [page 114](#)). We (the `gawk` authors) once had a user who mistakenly thought that the `BEGIN` rule is executed at the beginning of each data file and the `END` rule is executed at the end of each data file.

When informed that this was not the case, the user requested that we add new special patterns to `gawk`, named `BEGIN_FILE` and `END_FILE`, that would have the desired behavior. He even supplied us the code to do so.

Adding these special patterns to `gawk` wasn't necessary; the job can be done cleanly in `awk` itself, as illustrated by the following library program. It arranges to call two user-supplied functions, `beginfile()` and `endfile()`, at the beginning and end of each data file. Besides solving the problem in only nine(!) lines of code, it does so *portably*; this works with any implementation of `awk`:

```

# transfile.awk
#
# Give the user a hook for filename transitions
#
# The user must supply functions beginfile() and endfile()
# that each take the name of the file being started or
# finished, respectively.

FILENAME != _oldfilename \
{
    if (_oldfilename != "")
        endfile(_oldfilename)
    _oldfilename = FILENAME
    beginfile(FILENAME)
}

END { endfile(FILENAME) }

```

This file must be loaded before the user's "main" program, so that the rule it supplies is executed first.

This rule relies on `awk`'s `FILENAME` variable that automatically changes for each new data file. The current file name is saved in a private variable, `_oldfilename`. If `FILENAME` does not equal `_oldfilename`, then a new data file is being processed and it is necessary to call `endfile()` for the old file. Because `endfile()` should only be called if a file has been processed, the program first checks to make sure that `_oldfilename` is not the null string. The program then assigns the current file name to `_oldfilename` and calls `beginfile()` for the file. Because, like all `awk` variables, `_oldfilename` is initialized to the null string, this rule executes correctly even for the first data file.

The program also supplies an `END` rule to do the final processing for the last file. Because this `END` rule comes before any `END` rules supplied in the “main” program, `endfile()` is called first. Once again the value of multiple `BEGIN` and `END` rules should be clear.

If the same data file occurs twice in a row on the command line, then `endfile()` and `beginfile()` are not executed at the end of the first pass and at the beginning of the second pass. The following version solves the problem:

```
# ftrans.awk --- handle data file transitions
#
# user supplies beginfile() and endfile() functions

FNR == 1 {
    if (_filename_ != "")
        endfile(_filename_)
    _filename_ = FILENAME
    beginfile(FILENAME)
}

END { endfile(_filename_) }
```

[Section 13.2.7 \[Counting Things\], page 259](#), shows how this library function can be used and how it simplifies writing the main program.

### Advanced Notes: So Why Does `gawk` have `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE`?

You are probably wondering, if `beginfile()` and `endfile()` functions can do the job, why does `gawk` have `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE` patterns (see [Section 7.1.5 \[The `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE` Special Patterns\], page 115](#))?

Good question. Normally, if `awk` cannot open a file, this causes an immediate fatal error. In this case, there is no way for a user-defined function to deal with the problem, since the mechanism for calling it relies on the file being open and at the first record. Thus, the main reason for `BEGINFILE` is to give you a “hook” to catch files that cannot be processed. `ENDFILE` exists for symmetry, and because it provides an easy way to do per-file cleanup processing.

### 12.3.2 Rereading the Current File

Another request for a new built-in function was for a `rewind()` function that would make it possible to reread the current file. The requesting user didn’t want to have to use `getline` (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with `getline`\], page 67](#)) inside a loop.

However, as long as you are not in the END rule, it is quite easy to arrange to immediately close the current input file and then start over with it from the top. For lack of a better name, we'll call it `rewind()`:

```
# rewind.awk --- rewind the current file and start over

function rewind(    i)
{
    # shift remaining arguments up
    for (i = ARGC; i > ARGIND; i--)
        ARGV[i] = ARGV[i-1]

    # make sure gawk knows to keep going
    ARGV++

    # make current file next to get done
    ARGV[ARGIND+1] = FILENAME

    # do it
    nextfile
}
```

This code relies on the `ARGIND` variable (see [Section 7.5.2 \[Built-in Variables That Convey Information\]](#), page 129), which is specific to `gawk`. If you are not using `gawk`, you can use ideas presented in the previous section to either update `ARGIND` on your own or modify this code as appropriate.

The `rewind()` function also relies on the `nextfile` keyword (see [Section 7.4.9 \[Using gawk's nextfile Statement\]](#), page 125).

### 12.3.3 Checking for Readable Data Files

Normally, if you give `awk` a data file that isn't readable, it stops with a fatal error. There are times when you might want to just ignore such files and keep going. You can do this by prepending the following program to your `awk` program:

```
# readable.awk --- library file to skip over unreadable files

BEGIN {
    for (i = 1; i < ARGV; i++) {
        if (ARGV[i] ~ /^[[:alpha:]]*[:alnum:]*.*\/ \
            || ARGV[i] == "-" || ARGV[i] == "/dev/stdin")
            continue # assignment or standard input
        else if ((getline junk < ARGV[i]) < 0) # unreadable
            delete ARGV[i]
        else
            close(ARGV[i])
    }
}
```

This works, because the `getline` won't be fatal. Removing the element from `ARGV` with `delete` skips the file (since it's no longer in the list). See also [Section 7.5.3 \[Using ARGV and ARGV\], page 133](#).

### 12.3.4 Checking For Zero-length Files

All known `awk` implementations silently skip over zero-length files. This is a by-product of `awk`'s implicit read-a-record-and-match-against-the-rules loop: when `awk` tries to read a record from an empty file, it immediately receives an end of file indication, closes the file, and proceeds on to the next command-line data file, *without* executing any user-level `awk` program code.

Using `gawk`'s `ARGIND` variable (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\], page 126](#)), it is possible to detect when an empty data file has been skipped. Similar to the library file presented in [Section 12.3.1 \[Noting Data File Boundaries\], page 221](#), the following library file calls a function named `zerofile()` that the user must provide. The arguments passed are the file name and the position in `ARGV` where it was found:

```
# zerofile.awk --- library file to process empty input files

BEGIN { Argind = 0 }

ARGIND > Argind + 1 {
    for (Argind++; Argind < ARGIND; Argind++)
        zerofile(ARGV[Argind], Argind)
}

ARGIND != Argind { Argind = ARGIND }

END {
    if (ARGIND > Argind)
        for (Argind++; Argind <= ARGIND; Argind++)
            zerofile(ARGV[Argind], Argind)
}
```

The user-level variable `Argind` allows the `awk` program to track its progress through `ARGV`. Whenever the program detects that `ARGIND` is greater than `'Argind + 1'`, it means that one or more empty files were skipped. The action then calls `zerofile()` for each such file, incrementing `Argind` along the way.

The `'Argind != ARGIND'` rule simply keeps `Argind` up to date in the normal case.

Finally, the `END` rule catches the case of any empty files at the end of the command-line arguments. Note that the test in the condition of the `for` loop uses the `'<='` operator, not `'<'`.

As an exercise, you might consider whether this same problem can be solved without relying on `gawk`'s `ARGIND` variable.

As a second exercise, revise this code to handle the case where an intervening value in `ARGV` is a variable assignment.

### 12.3.5 Treating Assignments as File Names

Occasionally, you might not want `awk` to process command-line variable assignments (see [Section 6.1.3.2 \[Assigning Variables on the Command Line\]](#), page 92). In particular, if you have a file name that contain an '=' character, `awk` treats the file name as an assignment, and does not process it.

Some users have suggested an additional command-line option for `gawk` to disable command-line assignments. However, some simple programming with a library file does the trick:

```
# noassign.awk --- library file to avoid the need for a
# special option that disables command-line assignments

function disable_assigns(argc, argv,    i)
{
    for (i = 1; i < argc; i++)
        if (argv[i] ~ /^[[:alpha:]]*[:alnum:]*=.*$/)
            argv[i] = ("./" argv[i])
}

BEGIN {
    if (No_command_assign)
        disable_assigns(ARGC, ARGV)
}
```

You then run your program this way:

```
awk -v No_command_assign=1 -f noassign.awk -f yourprog.awk *
```

The function works by looping through the arguments. It prepends './' to any argument that matches the form of a variable assignment, turning that argument into a file name.

The use of `No_command_assign` allows you to disable command-line assignments at invocation time, by giving the variable a true value. When not set, it is initially zero (i.e., false), so the command-line arguments are left alone.

## 12.4 Processing Command-Line Options

Most utilities on POSIX compatible systems take options on the command line that can be used to change the way a program behaves. `awk` is an example of such a program (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25). Often, options take *arguments*; i.e., data that the program needs to correctly obey the command-line option. For example, `awk`'s '-F' option requires a string to use as the field separator. The first occurrence on the command line of either '--' or a string that does not begin with '-' ends the options.

Modern Unix systems provide a C function named `getopt()` for processing command-line arguments. The programmer provides a string describing the one-letter options. If an option requires an argument, it is followed in the string with a colon. `getopt()` is also passed the count and values of the command-line arguments and is called in a loop. `getopt()` processes the command-line arguments for option letters. Each time around the loop, it returns a single character representing the next option letter that it finds, or '?' if it finds an invalid option. When it returns -1, there are no options left on the command line.

When using `getopt()`, options that do not take arguments can be grouped together. Furthermore, options that take arguments require that the argument be present. The argument can immediately follow the option letter, or it can be a separate command-line argument.

Given a hypothetical program that takes three command-line options, `'-a'`, `'-b'`, and `'-c'`, where `'-b'` requires an argument, all of the following are valid ways of invoking the program:

```
prog -a -b foo -c data1 data2 data3
prog -ac -bfoo -- data1 data2 data3
prog -acbfoo data1 data2 data3
```

Notice that when the argument is grouped with its option, the rest of the argument is considered to be the option's argument. In this example, `'-acbfoo'` indicates that all of the `'-a'`, `'-b'`, and `'-c'` options were supplied, and that `'foo'` is the argument to the `'-b'` option.

`getopt()` provides four external variables that the programmer can use:

- `optind`     The index in the argument value array (`argv`) where the first nonoption command-line argument can be found.
- `optarg`     The string value of the argument to an option.
- `opterr`     Usually `getopt()` prints an error message when it finds an invalid option. Setting `opterr` to zero disables this feature. (An application might want to print its own error message.)
- `optopt`     The letter representing the command-line option.

The following C fragment shows how `getopt()` might process command-line arguments for `awk`:

```
int
main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    ...
    /* print our own message */
    opterr = 0;
    while ((c = getopt(argc, argv, "v:f:F:W:")) != -1) {
        switch (c) {
            case 'f':    /* file */
                ...
                break;
            case 'F':    /* field separator */
                ...
                break;
            case 'v':    /* variable assignment */
                ...
                break;
            case 'W':    /* extension */
                ...
                break;
        }
    }
}
```

```

        case '?':
        default:
            usage();
            break;
    }
}
...
}

```

As a side point, `gawk` actually uses the GNU `getopt_long()` function to process both normal and GNU-style long options (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

The abstraction provided by `getopt()` is very useful and is quite handy in `awk` programs as well. Following is an `awk` version of `getopt()`. This function highlights one of the greatest weaknesses in `awk`, which is that it is very poor at manipulating single characters. Repeated calls to `substr()` are necessary for accessing individual characters (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149).<sup>7</sup>

The discussion that follows walks through the code a bit at a time:

```

# getopt.awk --- Do C library getopt(3) function in awk

# External variables:
#   Optind -- index in ARGV of first nooption argument
#   Optarg  -- string value of argument to current option
#   Opterr  -- if nonzero, print our own diagnostic
#   Optopt  -- current option letter

# Returns:
#   -1      at end of options
#   "?"     for unrecognized option
#   <c>     a character representing the current option

# Private Data:
#   _opti   -- index in multi-flag option, e.g., -abc

```

The function starts out with comments presenting a list of the global variables it uses, what the return values are, what they mean, and any global variables that are “private” to this library function. Such documentation is essential for any program, and particularly for library functions.

The `getopt()` function first checks that it was indeed called with a string of options (the `options` parameter). If `options` has a zero length, `getopt()` immediately returns `-1`:

```

function getopt(argc, argv, options,   thisopt, i)
{
    if (length(options) == 0)   # no options given
        return -1

```

---

<sup>7</sup> This function was written before `gawk` acquired the ability to split strings into single characters using `"` as the separator. We have left it alone, since using `substr()` is more portable.

```

    if (argv[Optind] == "--") { # all done
        Optind++
        _opti = 0
        return -1
    } else if (argv[Optind] !~ /^-[^:[:space:]]/) {
        _opti = 0
        return -1
    }
}

```

The next thing to check for is the end of the options. A ‘--’ ends the command-line options, as does any command-line argument that does not begin with a ‘-’. `Optind` is used to step through the array of command-line arguments; it retains its value across calls to `getopt()`, because it is a global variable.

The regular expression that is used, `/^-[^:[:space:]]/`, checks for a ‘-’ followed by anything that is not whitespace and not a colon. If the current command-line argument does not match this pattern, it is not an option, and it ends option processing. Continuing on:

```

    if (_opti == 0)
        _opti = 2
    thisopt = substr(argv[Optind], _opti, 1)
    Optopt = thisopt
    i = index(options, thisopt)
    if (i == 0) {
        if (Opterr)
            printf("%c -- invalid option\n",
                    thisopt) > "/dev/stderr"
        if (_opti >= length(argv[Optind])) {
            Optind++
            _opti = 0
        } else
            _opti++
        return "?"
    }
}

```

The `_opti` variable tracks the position in the current command-line argument (`argv[Optind]`). If multiple options are grouped together with one ‘-’ (e.g., ‘-abx’), it is necessary to return them to the user one at a time.

If `_opti` is equal to zero, it is set to two, which is the index in the string of the next character to look at (we skip the ‘-’, which is at position one). The variable `thisopt` holds the character, obtained with `substr()`. It is saved in `Optopt` for the main program to use.

If `thisopt` is not in the `options` string, then it is an invalid option. If `Opterr` is nonzero, `getopt()` prints an error message on the standard error that is similar to the message from the C version of `getopt()`.

Because the option is invalid, it is necessary to skip it and move on to the next option character. If `_opti` is greater than or equal to the length of the current command-line argument, it is necessary to move on to the next argument, so `Optind` is incremented and `_opti` is reset to zero. Otherwise, `Optind` is left alone and `_opti` is merely incremented.

In any case, because the option is invalid, `getopt()` returns "?". The main program can examine `Optopt` if it needs to know what the invalid option letter actually is. Continuing on:

```

if (substr(options, i + 1, 1) == ":") {
    # get option argument
    if (length(substr(argv[Optind], _opti + 1)) > 0)
        Optarg = substr(argv[Optind], _opti + 1)
    else
        Optarg = argv[++Optind]
    _opti = 0
} else
    Optarg = ""

```

If the option requires an argument, the option letter is followed by a colon in the `options` string. If there are remaining characters in the current command-line argument (`argv[Optind]`), then the rest of that string is assigned to `Optarg`. Otherwise, the next command-line argument is used (`-xFOO` versus `-x FOO`). In either case, `_opti` is reset to zero, because there are no more characters left to examine in the current command-line argument. Continuing:

```

if (_opti == 0 || _opti >= length(argv[Optind])) {
    Optind++
    _opti = 0
} else
    _opti++
return thisopt
}

```

Finally, if `_opti` is either zero or greater than the length of the current command-line argument, it means this element in `argv` is through being processed, so `Optind` is incremented to point to the next element in `argv`. If neither condition is true, then only `_opti` is incremented, so that the next option letter can be processed on the next call to `getopt()`.

The `BEGIN` rule initializes both `Opterr` and `Optind` to one. `Opterr` is set to one, since the default behavior is for `getopt()` to print a diagnostic message upon seeing an invalid option. `Optind` is set to one, since there's no reason to look at the program name, which is in `ARGV[0]`:

```

BEGIN {
    Opterr = 1    # default is to diagnose
    Optind = 1   # skip ARGV[0]

    # test program
    if (_getopt_test) {
        while ((_go_c = getopt(ARGC, ARGV, "ab:cd")) != -1)
            printf("c = <%c>, optarg = <%s>\n",
                _go_c, Optarg)
        printf("non-option arguments:\n")
        for (; Optind < ARGC; Optind++)

```

```

        printf("\tARGV[%d] = <%s>\n",
                Optind, ARGV[Optind])
    }
}

```

The rest of the BEGIN rule is a simple test program. Here is the result of two sample runs of the test program:

```

$ awk -f getopt.awk -v _getopt_test=1 -- -a -cbARG bax -x
+ c = <a>, optarg = <>
+ c = <c>, optarg = <>
+ c = <b>, optarg = <ARG>
+ non-option arguments:
+     ARGV[3] = <bax>
+     ARGV[4] = <-x>

$ awk -f getopt.awk -v _getopt_test=1 -- -a -x -- xyz abc
+ c = <a>, optarg = <>
+ error x -- invalid option
+ c = <?>, optarg = <>
+ non-option arguments:
+     ARGV[4] = <xyz>
+     ARGV[5] = <abc>

```

In both runs, the first ‘--’ terminates the arguments to `awk`, so that it does not try to interpret the ‘-a’, etc., as its own options.

**NOTE:** After `getopt()` is through, it is the responsibility of the user level code to clear out all the elements of `ARGV` from 1 to `Optind`, so that `awk` does not try to process the command-line options as file names.

Several of the sample programs presented in [Chapter 13 \[Practical awk Programs\]](#), [page 241](#), use `getopt()` to process their arguments.

## 12.5 Reading the User Database

The `PROCINFO` array (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), [page 126](#)) provides access to the current user’s real and effective user and group ID numbers, and if available, the user’s supplementary group set. However, because these are numbers, they do not provide very useful information to the average user. There needs to be some way to find the user information associated with the user and group ID numbers. This section presents a suite of functions for retrieving information from the user database. See [Section 12.6 \[Reading the Group Database\]](#), [page 234](#), for a similar suite that retrieves information from the group database.

The POSIX standard does not define the file where user information is kept. Instead, it provides the `<pwd.h>` header file and several C language subroutines for obtaining user information. The primary function is `getpwent()`, for “get password entry.” The “password” comes from the original user database file, `/etc/passwd`, which stores user information, along with the encrypted passwords (hence the name).

While an `awk` program could simply read `/etc/passwd` directly, this file may not contain complete information about the system's set of users.<sup>8</sup> To be sure you are able to produce a readable and complete version of the user database, it is necessary to write a small C program that calls `getpwent()`. `getpwent()` is defined as returning a pointer to a `struct passwd`. Each time it is called, it returns the next entry in the database. When there are no more entries, it returns `NULL`, the null pointer. When this happens, the C program should call `endpwent()` to close the database. Following is `pwcat`, a C program that “cats” the password database:

```
/*
 * pwcat.c
 *
 * Generate a printable version of the password database
 */
#include <stdio.h>
#include <pwd.h>

int
main(int argc, char **argv)
{
    struct passwd *p;

    while ((p = getpwent()) != NULL)
        printf("%s:%s:%ld:%ld:%s:%s:%s\n",
            p->pw_name, p->pw_passwd, (long) p->pw_uid,
            (long) p->pw_gid, p->pw_gecos, p->pw_dir, p->pw_shell);

    endpwent();
    return 0;
}
```

If you don't understand C, don't worry about it. The output from `pwcat` is the user database, in the traditional `/etc/passwd` format of colon-separated fields. The fields are:

Login name

The user's login name.

Encrypted password

The user's encrypted password. This may not be available on some systems.

User-ID The user's numeric user ID number. (On some systems it's a C `long`, and not an `int`. Thus we cast it to `long` for all cases.)

Group-ID The user's numeric group ID number. (Similar comments about `long` vs. `int` apply here.)

Full name The user's full name, and perhaps other information associated with the user.

Home directory

The user's login (or “home”) directory (familiar to shell programmers as `$HOME`).

---

<sup>8</sup> It is often the case that password information is stored in a network database.

**Login shell**

The program that is run when the user logs in. This is usually a shell, such as Bash.

A few lines representative of `pwcat`'s output are as follows:

```
$ pwcat
-| root:30v02d5VaUPB6:0:1:Operator://:bin/sh
-| nobody:*:65534:65534://:
-| daemon:*:1:1://:
-| sys:*:2:2://:bin/csh
-| bin:*:3:3:~/bin:
-| arnold:xyzy:2076:10:Arnold Robbins:/home/arnold:/bin/sh
-| miriam:yxaay:112:10:Miriam Robbins:/home/miriam:/bin/sh
-| andy:abcca2:113:10:Andy Jacobs:/home/andy:/bin/sh
...
```

With that introduction, following is a group of functions for getting user information. There are several functions here, corresponding to the C functions of the same names:

```
# passwd.awk --- access password file information

BEGIN {
    # tailor this to suit your system
    _pw_awklib = "/usr/local/libexec/awk/"
}

function _pw_init(    oldfs, oldrs, olddol0, pwcat, using_fw, using_fpat)
{
    if (_pw_initiated)
        return

    oldfs = FS
    oldrs = RS
    olddol0 = $0
    using_fw = (PROCINFO["FS"] == "FIELDWIDTHS")
    using_fpat = (PROCINFO["FS"] == "FPAT")
    FS = ":"
    RS = "\n"

    pwcat = _pw_awklib "pwcat"
    while ((pwcat | getline) > 0) {
        _pw_byname[$1] = $0
        _pw_byuid[$3] = $0
        _pw_bycount[++_pw_total] = $0
    }
    close(pwcat)
    _pw_count = 0
    _pw_initiated = 1
    FS = oldfs
}
```

```

    if (using_fw)
        FIELDWIDTHS = FIELDWIDTHS
    else if (using_fpat)
        FPAT = FPAT
    RS = oldrs
    $0 = olddo10
}

```

The `BEGIN` rule sets a private variable to the directory where `pwcat` is stored. Because it is used to help out an `awk` library routine, we have chosen to put it in `‘/usr/local/libexec/awk’`; however, you might want it to be in a different directory on your system.

The function `_pw_init()` keeps three copies of the user information in three associative arrays. The arrays are indexed by username (`_pw_byname`), by user ID number (`_pw_byuid`), and by order of occurrence (`_pw_bycount`). The variable `_pw_inited` is used for efficiency, since `_pw_init()` needs to be called only once.

Because this function uses `getline` to read information from `pwcat`, it first saves the values of `FS`, `RS`, and `$0`. It notes in the variable `using_fw` whether field splitting with `FIELDWIDTHS` is in effect or not. Doing so is necessary, since these functions could be called from anywhere within a user’s program, and the user may have his or her own way of splitting records and fields.

The `using_fw` variable checks `PROCINFO["FS"]`, which is `"FIELDWIDTHS"` if field splitting is being done with `FIELDWIDTHS`. This makes it possible to restore the correct field-splitting mechanism later. The test can only be true for `gawk`. It is false if using `FS` or `FPAT`, or on some other `awk` implementation.

The code that checks for using `FPAT`, using `using_fpat` and `PROCINFO["FS"]` is similar.

The main part of the function uses a loop to read database lines, split the line into fields, and then store the line into each array as necessary. When the loop is done, `_pw_init()` cleans up by closing the pipeline, setting `_pw_inited` to one, and restoring `FS` (and `FIELDWIDTHS` or `FPAT` if necessary), `RS`, and `$0`. The use of `_pw_count` is explained shortly.

The `getpwnam()` function takes a username as a string argument. If that user is in the database, it returns the appropriate line. Otherwise, it relies on the array reference to a nonexistent element to create the element with the null string as its value:

```

function getpwnam(name)
{
    _pw_init()
    return _pw_byname[name]
}

```

Similarly, the `getpwuid` function takes a user ID number argument. If that user number is in the database, it returns the appropriate line. Otherwise, it returns the null string:

```

function getpwuid(uid)
{
    _pw_init()
    return _pw_byuid[uid]
}

```

The `getpwent()` function simply steps through the database, one entry at a time. It uses `_pw_count` to track its current position in the `_pw_bycount` array:

```
function getpwent()
{
    _pw_init()
    if (_pw_count < _pw_total)
        return _pw_bycount[++_pw_count]
    return ""
}
```

The `endpwent()` function resets `_pw_count` to zero, so that subsequent calls to `getpwent()` start over again:

```
function endpwent()
{
    _pw_count = 0
}
```

A conscious design decision in this suite is that each subroutine calls `_pw_init()` to initialize the database arrays. The overhead of running a separate process to generate the user database, and the I/O to scan it, are only incurred if the user's main program actually calls one of these functions. If this library file is loaded along with a user's program, but none of the routines are ever called, then there is no extra runtime overhead. (The alternative is move the body of `_pw_init()` into a `BEGIN` rule, which always runs `pwcat`. This simplifies the code but runs an extra process that may never be needed.)

In turn, calling `_pw_init()` is not too expensive, because the `_pw_inited` variable keeps the program from reading the data more than once. If you are worried about squeezing every last cycle out of your `awk` program, the check of `_pw_inited` could be moved out of `_pw_init()` and duplicated in all the other functions. In practice, this is not necessary, since most `awk` programs are I/O-bound, and such a change would clutter up the code.

The `id` program in [Section 13.2.3 \[Printing out User Information\]](#), page 250, uses these functions.

## 12.6 Reading the Group Database

Much of the discussion presented in [Section 12.5 \[Reading the User Database\]](#), page 230, applies to the group database as well. Although there has traditionally been a well-known file (`/etc/group`) in a well-known format, the POSIX standard only provides a set of C library routines (`<grp.h>` and `getgrent()`) for accessing the information. Even though this file may exist, it may not have complete information. Therefore, as with the user database, it is necessary to have a small C program that generates the group database as its output. `grcat`, a C program that “cats” the group database, is as follows:

```
/*
 * grcat.c
 *
 * Generate a printable version of the group database
 */
#include <stdio.h>
#include <grp.h>
```

```

int
main(int argc, char **argv)
{
    struct group *g;
    int i;

    while ((g = getgrent()) != NULL) {
        printf("%s:%s:%ld:", g->gr_name, g->gr_passwd,
              (long) g->gr_gid);
        for (i = 0; g->gr_mem[i] != NULL; i++) {
            printf("%s", g->gr_mem[i]);
            if (g->gr_mem[i+1] != NULL)
                putchar(',');
        }
        putchar('\n');
    }
    endgrent();
    return 0;
}

```

Each line in the group database represents one group. The fields are separated with colons and represent the following information:

#### Group Name

The group's name.

#### Group Password

The group's encrypted password. In practice, this field is never used; it is usually empty or set to '\*'.

#### Group ID Number

The group's numeric group ID number; this number must be unique within the file. (On some systems it's a C `long`, and not an `int`. Thus we cast it to `long` for all cases.)

#### Group Member List

A comma-separated list of user names. These users are members of the group. Modern Unix systems allow users to be members of several groups simultaneously. If your system does, then there are elements "group1" through "groupN" in `PROCINFO` for those group ID numbers. (Note that `PROCINFO` is a `gawk` extension; see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126.)

Here is what running `grcat` might produce:

```

$ grcat
+ wheel:*:0:arnold
+ nogroup:*:65534:
+ daemon:*:1:
+ kmem:*:2:
+ staff:*:10:arnold,miriam,andy

```

```

-| other:*:20:
...

```

Here are the functions for obtaining information from the group database. There are several, modeled after the C library functions of the same names:

```

# group.awk --- functions for dealing with the group file

BEGIN    \
{
    # Change to suit your system
    _gr_awklib = "/usr/local/libexec/awk/"
}

function _gr_init(    oldfs, oldrs, olddol0, grcat,
                    using_fw, using_fpat, n, a, i)
{
    if (_gr_initied)
        return

    oldfs = FS
    oldrs = RS
    olddol0 = $0
    using_fw = (PROCINFO["FS"] == "FIELDWIDTHS")
    using_fpat = (PROCINFO["FS"] == "FPAT")
    FS = ":"
    RS = "\n"

    grcat = _gr_awklib "grcat"
    while ((grcat | getline) > 0) {
        if ($1 in _gr_byname)
            _gr_byname[$1] = _gr_byname[$1] ", " $4
        else
            _gr_byname[$1] = $0
        if ($3 in _gr_bygid)
            _gr_bygid[$3] = _gr_bygid[$3] ", " $4
        else
            _gr_bygid[$3] = $0

        n = split($4, a, "[ \t]*,[ \t]*")
        for (i = 1; i <= n; i++)
            if (a[i] in _gr_groupsbyuser)
                _gr_groupsbyuser[a[i]] = \
                    _gr_groupsbyuser[a[i]] " " $1
            else
                _gr_groupsbyuser[a[i]] = $1

        _gr_bycount[++_gr_count] = $0
    }
}

```

```

}
close(grcat)
_gr_count = 0
_gr_initied++
FS = oldfs
if (using_fw)
    FIELDWIDTHS = FIELDWIDTHS
else if (using_fpat)
    FPAT = FPAT
RS = oldrs
$0 = olddol0
}

```

The `BEGIN` rule sets a private variable to the directory where `grcat` is stored. Because it is used to help out an `awk` library routine, we have chosen to put it in `‘/usr/local/libexec/awk’`. You might want it to be in a different directory on your system.

These routines follow the same general outline as the user database routines (see [Section 12.5 \[Reading the User Database\], page 230](#)). The `_gr_initied` variable is used to ensure that the database is scanned no more than once. The `_gr_init()` function first saves `FS`, `RS`, and `$0`, and then sets `FS` and `RS` to the correct values for scanning the group information. It also takes care to note whether `FIELDWIDTHS` or `FPAT` is being used, and to restore the appropriate field splitting mechanism.

The group information is stored in several associative arrays. The arrays are indexed by group name (`_gr_byname`), by group ID number (`_gr_bygid`), and by position in the database (`_gr_bycount`). There is an additional array indexed by user name (`_gr_groupsbyuser`), which is a space-separated list of groups to which each user belongs.

Unlike the user database, it is possible to have multiple records in the database for the same group. This is common when a group has a large number of members. A pair of such entries might look like the following:

```

tvpeople:*:101:johnny,jay,arsenio
tvpeople:*:101:david,conan,tom,joan

```

For this reason, `_gr_init()` looks to see if a group name or group ID number is already seen. If it is, then the user names are simply concatenated onto the previous list of users. (There is actually a subtle problem with the code just presented. Suppose that the first time there were no names. This code adds the names with a leading comma. It also doesn't check that there is a `$4`.)

Finally, `_gr_init()` closes the pipeline to `grcat`, restores `FS` (and `FIELDWIDTHS` or `FPAT` if necessary), `RS`, and `$0`, initializes `_gr_count` to zero (it is used later), and makes `_gr_initied` nonzero.

The `getgrnam()` function takes a group name as its argument, and if that group exists, it is returned. Otherwise, it relies on the array reference to a nonexistent element to create the element with the null string as its value:

```

function getgrnam(group)
{
    _gr_init()
}

```

```

    return _gr_byname[group]
}

```

The `getgrgid()` function is similar; it takes a numeric group ID and looks up the information associated with that group ID:

```

function getgrgid(gid)
{
    _gr_init()
    return _gr_bygid[gid]
}

```

The `getgruser()` function does not have a C counterpart. It takes a user name and returns the list of groups that have the user as a member:

```

function getgruser(user)
{
    _gr_init()
    return _gr_groupsbyuser[user]
}

```

The `getgrent()` function steps through the database one entry at a time. It uses `_gr_count` to track its position in the list:

```

function getgrent()
{
    _gr_init()
    if (++_gr_count in _gr_bycount)
        return _gr_bycount[_gr_count]
    return ""
}

```

The `endgrent()` function resets `_gr_count` to zero so that `getgrent()` can start over again:

```

function endgrent()
{
    _gr_count = 0
}

```

As with the user database routines, each function calls `_gr_init()` to initialize the arrays. Doing so only incurs the extra overhead of running `grcat` if these functions are used (as opposed to moving the body of `_gr_init()` into a `BEGIN` rule).

Most of the work is in scanning the database and building the various associative arrays. The functions that the user calls are themselves very simple, relying on `awk`'s associative arrays to do work.

The `id` program in [Section 13.2.3 \[Printing out User Information\]](#), page 250, uses these functions.

## 12.7 Traversing Arrays of Arrays

[Section 8.6 \[Arrays of Arrays\]](#), page 144, described how `gawk` provides arrays of arrays. In particular, any element of an array may be either a scalar, or another array. The `isarray()` function (see [Section 9.1.7 \[Getting Type Information\]](#), page 170) lets you distinguish an

array from a scalar. The following function, `walk_array()`, recursively traverses an array, printing each element's indices and value. You call it with the array and a string representing the name of the array:

```
function walk_array(arr, name, i)
{
    for (i in arr) {
        if (isarray(arr[i]))
            walk_array(arr[i], (name "[" i "]"))
        else
            printf("%s[%s] = %s\n", name, i, arr[i])
    }
}
```

It works by looping over each element of the array. If any given element is itself an array, the function calls itself recursively, passing the subarray and a new string representing the current index. Otherwise, the function simply prints the element's name, index, and value. Here is a main program to demonstrate:

```
BEGIN {
    a[1] = 1
    a[2][1] = 21
    a[2][2] = 22
    a[3] = 3
    a[4][1][1] = 411
    a[4][2] = 42

    walk_array(a, "a")
}
```

When run, the program produces the following output:

```
$ gawk -f walk_array.awk
+ a[4][1][1] = 411
+ a[4][2] = 42
+ a[1] = 1
+ a[2][1] = 21
+ a[2][2] = 22
+ a[3] = 3
```



## 13 Practical awk Programs

Chapter 12 [A Library of awk Functions], page 211, presents the idea that reading programs in a language contributes to learning that language. This chapter continues that theme, presenting a potpourri of `awk` programs for your reading enjoyment. There are three sections. The first describes how to run the programs presented in this chapter.

The second presents `awk` versions of several common POSIX utilities. These are programs that you are hopefully already familiar with, and therefore, whose problems are understood. By reimplementing these programs in `awk`, you can focus on the `awk`-related aspects of solving the programming problem.

The third is a grab bag of interesting programs. These solve a number of different data-manipulation and management problems. Many of the programs are short, which emphasizes `awk`'s ability to do a lot in just a few lines of code.

Many of these programs use library functions presented in Chapter 12 [A Library of awk Functions], page 211.

### 13.1 Running the Example Programs

To run a given program, you would typically do something like this:

```
awk -f program -- options files
```

Here, *program* is the name of the `awk` program (such as `cut.awk`), *options* are any command-line options for the program that start with a `-`, and *files* are the actual data files.

If your system supports the `#!` executable interpreter mechanism (see Section 1.1.4 [Executable awk Programs], page 13), you can instead run your program directly:

```
cut.awk -c1-8 myfiles > results
```

If your `awk` is not `gawk`, you may instead need to use this:

```
cut.awk -- -c1-8 myfiles > results
```

### 13.2 Reinventing Wheels for Fun and Profit

This section presents a number of POSIX utilities implemented in `awk`. Reinventing these programs in `awk` is often enjoyable, because the algorithms can be very clearly expressed, and the code is usually very concise and simple. This is true because `awk` does so much for you.

It should be noted that these programs are not necessarily intended to replace the installed versions on your system. Nor may all of these programs be fully compliant with the most recent POSIX standard. This is not a problem; their purpose is to illustrate `awk` language programming for “real world” tasks.

The programs are presented in alphabetical order.

#### 13.2.1 Cutting out Fields and Columns

The `cut` utility selects, or “cuts,” characters or fields from its standard input and sends them to its standard output. Fields are separated by TABs by default, but you may supply

a command-line option to change the field *delimiter* (i.e., the field-separator character). `cut`'s definition of fields is less general than `awk`'s.

A common use of `cut` might be to pull out just the login name of logged-on users from the output of `who`. For example, the following pipeline generates a sorted, unique list of the logged-on users:

```
who | cut -c1-8 | sort | uniq
```

The options for `cut` are:

- `-c list` Use *list* as the list of characters to cut out. Items within the list may be separated by commas, and ranges of characters can be separated with dashes. The list '1-8,15,22-35' specifies characters 1 through 8, 15, and 22 through 35.
- `-f list` Use *list* as the list of fields to cut out.
- `-d delim` Use *delim* as the field-separator character instead of the TAB character.
- `-s` Suppress printing of lines that do not contain the field delimiter.

The `awk` implementation of `cut` uses the `getopt()` library function (see [Section 12.4 \[Processing Command-Line Options\]](#), page 225) and the `join()` library function (see [Section 12.2.6 \[Merging an Array into a String\]](#), page 218).

The program begins with a comment describing the options, the library functions needed, and a `usage()` function that prints out a usage message and exits. `usage()` is called if invalid arguments are supplied:

```
# cut.awk --- implement cut in awk

# Options:
# -f list      Cut fields
# -d c        Field delimiter character
# -c list     Cut characters
#
# -s          Suppress lines without the delimiter
#
# Requires getopt() and join() library functions

function usage( e1, e2)
{
    e1 = "usage: cut [-f list] [-d c] [-s] [files...]"
    e2 = "usage: cut [-c list] [files...]"
    print e1 > "/dev/stderr"
    print e2 > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}
```

The variables `e1` and `e2` are used so that the function fits nicely on the page.

Next comes a `BEGIN` rule that parses the command-line options. It sets `FS` to a single TAB character, because that is `cut`'s default field separator. The rule then sets the output field separator to be the same as the input field separator. A loop using `getopt()` steps

through the command-line options. Exactly one of the variables `by_fields` or `by_chars` is set to true, to indicate that processing should be done by fields or by characters, respectively. When cutting by characters, the output field separator is set to the null string:

```
BEGIN    \
{
    FS = "\t"    # default
    OFS = FS
    while ((c = getopt(ARGC, ARGV, "sf:c:d:")) != -1) {
        if (c == "f") {
            by_fields = 1
            fieldlist = Optarg
        } else if (c == "c") {
            by_chars = 1
            fieldlist = Optarg
            OFS = ""
        } else if (c == "d") {
            if (length(Optarg) > 1) {
                printf("Using first character of %s" \
                    " for delimiter\n", Optarg) > "/dev/stderr"
                Optarg = substr(Optarg, 1, 1)
            }
            FS = Optarg
            OFS = FS
            if (FS == " ")    # defeat awk semantics
                FS = "[ ]"
        } else if (c == "s")
            suppress++
        else
            usage()
    }

    # Clear out options
    for (i = 1; i < Optind; i++)
        ARGV[i] = ""
```

The code must take special care when the field delimiter is a space. Using a single space (" ") for the value of `FS` is incorrect—`awk` would separate fields with runs of spaces, TABs, and/or newlines, and we want them to be separated with individual spaces. Also remember that after `getopt()` is through (as described in [Section 12.4 \[Processing Command-Line Options\], page 225](#)), we have to clear out all the elements of `ARGV` from 1 to `Optind`, so that `awk` does not try to process the command-line options as file names.

After dealing with the command-line options, the program verifies that the options make sense. Only one or the other of `'-c'` and `'-f'` should be used, and both require a field list. Then the program calls either `set_fieldlist()` or `set_charlist()` to pull apart the list of fields or characters:

```
if (by_fields && by_chars)
    usage()
```

```

    if (by_fields == 0 && by_chars == 0)
        by_fields = 1    # default

    if (fieldlist == "") {
        print "cut: needs list for -c or -f" > "/dev/stderr"
        exit 1
    }

    if (by_fields)
        set_fieldlist()
    else
        set_charlist()
}

```

`set_fieldlist()` splits the field list apart at the commas into an array. Then, for each element of the array, it looks to see if the element is actually a range, and if so, splits it apart. The function checks the range to make sure that the first number is smaller than the second. Each number in the list is added to the `flist` array, which simply lists the fields that will be printed. Normal field splitting is used. The program lets `awk` handle the job of doing the field splitting:

```

function set_fieldlist(      n, m, i, j, k, f, g)
{
    n = split(fieldlist, f, ",")
    j = 1    # index in flist
    for (i = 1; i <= n; i++) {
        if (index(f[i], "-") != 0) { # a range
            m = split(f[i], g, "-")
            if (m != 2 || g[1] >= g[2]) {
                printf("bad field list: %s\n",
                    f[i]) > "/dev/stderr"

                exit 1
            }
            for (k = g[1]; k <= g[2]; k++)
                flist[j++] = k
        } else
            flist[j++] = f[i]
    }
    nfields = j - 1
}

```

The `set_charlist()` function is more complicated than `set_fieldlist()`. The idea here is to use `gawk`'s `FIELDWIDTHS` variable (see [Section 4.6 \[Reading Fixed-Width Data\], page 61](#)), which describes constant-width input. When using a character list, that is exactly what we have.

Setting up `FIELDWIDTHS` is more complicated than simply listing the fields that need to be printed. We have to keep track of the fields to print and also the intervening characters that have to be skipped. For example, suppose you wanted characters 1 through 8, 15, and

22 through 35. You would use `'-c 1-8,15,22-35'`. The necessary value for `FIELDWIDTHS` is `"8 6 1 6 14"`. This yields five fields, and the fields to print are \$1, \$3, and \$5. The intermediate fields are *filler*, which is stuff in between the desired data. `flist` lists the fields to print, and `t` tracks the complete field list, including filler fields:

```
function set_charlist( field, i, j, f, g, t,
                    filler, last, len)
{
    field = 1    # count total fields
    n = split(fieldlist, f, ",")
    j = 1        # index in flist
    for (i = 1; i <= n; i++) {
        if (index(f[i], "-") != 0) { # range
            m = split(f[i], g, "-")
            if (m != 2 || g[1] >= g[2]) {
                printf("bad character list: %s\n",
                    f[i]) > "/dev/stderr"
                exit 1
            }
            len = g[2] - g[1] + 1
            if (g[1] > 1) # compute length of filler
                filler = g[1] - last - 1
            else
                filler = 0
            if (filler)
                t[field++] = filler
            t[field++] = len # length of field
            last = g[2]
            flist[j++] = field - 1
        } else {
            if (f[i] > 1)
                filler = f[i] - last - 1
            else
                filler = 0
            if (filler)
                t[field++] = filler
            t[field++] = 1
            last = f[i]
            flist[j++] = field - 1
        }
    }
    FIELDWIDTHS = join(t, 1, field - 1)
    nfields = j - 1
}
```

Next is the rule that actually processes the data. If the `'-s'` option is given, then `suppress` is true. The first `if` statement makes sure that the input record does have the

field separator. If `cut` is processing fields, `suppress` is true, and the field separator character is not in the record, then the record is skipped.

If the record is valid, then `gawk` has split the data into fields, either using the character in `FS` or using fixed-length fields and `FIELDWIDTHS`. The loop goes through the list of fields that should be printed. The corresponding field is printed if it contains data. If the next field also has data, then the separator character is written out between the fields:

```
{
    if (by_fields && suppress && index($0, FS) != 0)
        next

    for (i = 1; i <= nfields; i++) {
        if ($flist[i] != "") {
            printf "%s", $flist[i]
            if (i < nfields && $flist[i+1] != "")
                printf "%s", OFS
        }
    }
    print ""
}
```

This version of `cut` relies on `gawk`'s `FIELDWIDTHS` variable to do the character-based cutting. While it is possible in other `awk` implementations to use `substr()` (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\], page 149](#)), it is also extremely painful. The `FIELDWIDTHS` variable supplies an elegant solution to the problem of picking the input line apart by characters.

### 13.2.2 Searching for Regular Expressions in Files

The `egrep` utility searches files for patterns. It uses regular expressions that are almost identical to those available in `awk` (see [Chapter 3 \[Regular Expressions\], page 37](#)). You invoke it as follows:

```
egrep [ options ] 'pattern' files ...
```

The *pattern* is a regular expression. In typical usage, the regular expression is quoted to prevent the shell from expanding any of the special characters as file name wildcards. Normally, `egrep` prints the lines that matched. If multiple file names are provided on the command line, each output line is preceded by the name of the file and a colon.

The options to `egrep` are as follows:

- c        Print out a count of the lines that matched the pattern, instead of the lines themselves.
- s        Be silent. No output is produced and the exit value indicates whether the pattern was matched.
- v        Invert the sense of the test. `egrep` prints the lines that do *not* match the pattern and exits successfully if the pattern is not matched.
- i        Ignore case distinctions in both the pattern and the input data.
- l        Only print (list) the names of the files that matched, not the lines that matched.

**-e pattern**

Use *pattern* as the regexp to match. The purpose of the ‘-e’ option is to allow patterns that start with a ‘-’.

This version uses the `getopt()` library function (see [Section 12.4 \[Processing Command-Line Options\]](#), page 225) and the file transition library program (see [Section 12.3.1 \[Noting Data File Boundaries\]](#), page 221).

The program begins with a descriptive comment and then a `BEGIN` rule that processes the command-line arguments with `getopt()`. The ‘-i’ (ignore case) option is particularly easy with `gawk`; we just use the `IGNORECASE` built-in variable (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126):

```
# egrep.awk --- simulate egrep in awk
#
# Options:
#   -c    count of lines
#   -s    silent - use exit value
#   -v    invert test, success if no match
#   -i    ignore case
#   -l    print filenames only
#   -e    argument is pattern
#
# Requires getopt and file transition library functions

BEGIN {
    while ((c = getopt(ARGC, ARGV, "ce:svil")) != -1) {
        if (c == "c")
            count_only++
        else if (c == "s")
            no_print++
        else if (c == "v")
            invert++
        else if (c == "i")
            IGNORECASE = 1
        else if (c == "l")
            filenames_only++
        else if (c == "e")
            pattern = Optarg
        else
            usage()
    }
}
```

Next comes the code that handles the `egrep`-specific behavior. If no pattern is supplied with ‘-e’, the first nonoption on the command line is used. The `awk` command-line arguments up to `ARGV[Optind]` are cleared, so that `awk` won’t try to process them as files. If no files are specified, the standard input is used, and if multiple files are specified, we make sure to note this so that the file names can precede the matched lines in the output:

```
if (pattern == "")
```

```

        pattern = ARGV[Optind++]

    for (i = 1; i < Optind; i++)
        ARGV[i] = ""
    if (Optind >= ARGV) {
        ARGV[1] = "-"
        ARGV = 2
    } else if (ARGV - Optind > 1)
        do_filenames++

#    if (IGNORECASE)
#        pattern = tolower(pattern)
}

```

The last two lines are commented out, since they are not needed in `gawk`. They should be uncommented if you have to use another version of `awk`.

The next set of lines should be uncommented if you are not using `gawk`. This rule translates all the characters in the input line into lowercase if the `-i` option is specified.<sup>1</sup> The rule is commented out since it is not necessary with `gawk`:

```

#{
#    if (IGNORECASE)
#        $0 = tolower($0)
#}

```

The `beginfile()` function is called by the rule in `ftrans.awk` when each new file is processed. In this case, it is very simple; all it does is initialize a variable `fcount` to zero. `fcount` tracks how many lines in the current file matched the pattern. Naming the parameter `junk` shows we know that `beginfile()` is called with a parameter, but that we're not interested in its value:

```

function beginfile(junk)
{
    fcount = 0
}

```

The `endfile()` function is called after each file has been processed. It affects the output only when the user wants a count of the number of lines that matched. `no_print` is true only if the exit status is desired. `count_only` is true if line counts are desired. `egrep` therefore only prints line counts if printing and counting are enabled. The output format must be adjusted depending upon the number of files to process. Finally, `fcount` is added to `total`, so that we know the total number of lines that matched the pattern:

```

function endfile(file)
{
    if (! no_print && count_only) {
        if (do_filenames)
            print file ":" fcount
        else

```

---

<sup>1</sup> It also introduces a subtle bug; if a match happens, we output the translated line, not the original.

```

        print fcount
    }

    total += fcount
}

```

The following rule does most of the work of matching lines. The variable `matches` is true if the line matched the pattern. If the user wants lines that did not match, the sense of `matches` is inverted using the `!` operator. `fcount` is incremented with the value of `matches`, which is either one or zero, depending upon a successful or unsuccessful match. If the line does not match, the `next` statement just moves on to the next record.

A number of additional tests are made, but they are only done if we are not counting lines. First, if the user only wants exit status (`no_print` is true), then it is enough to know that *one* line in this file matched, and we can skip on to the next file with `nextfile`. Similarly, if we are only printing file names, we can print the file name, and then skip to the next file with `nextfile`. Finally, each line is printed, with a leading file name and colon if necessary:

```

{
    matches = ($0 ~ pattern)
    if (invert)
        matches = ! matches

    fcount += matches    # 1 or 0

    if (! matches)
        next

    if (! count_only) {
        if (no_print)
            nextfile

        if (filenames_only) {
            print FILENAME
            nextfile
        }

        if (do_filenames)
            print FILENAME ":" $0
        else
            print
    }
}

```

The `END` rule takes care of producing the correct exit status. If there are no matches, the exit status is one; otherwise it is zero:

```

END    \
{
    if (total == 0)

```

```

        exit 1
    exit 0
}

```

The `usage()` function prints a usage message in case of invalid options, and then exits:

```

function usage( e)
{
    e = "Usage: egrep [-csvil] [-e pat] [files ...]"
    e = e "\n\tegrep [-csvil] pat [files ...]"
    print e > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}

```

The variable `e` is used so that the function fits nicely on the printed page.

Just a note on programming style: you may have noticed that the `END` rule uses backslash continuation, with the open brace on a line by itself. This is so that it more closely resembles the way functions are written. Many of the examples in this chapter use this style. You can decide for yourself if you like writing your `BEGIN` and `END` rules this way or not.

### 13.2.3 Printing out User Information

The `id` utility lists a user's real and effective user ID numbers, real and effective group ID numbers, and the user's group set, if any. `id` only prints the effective user ID and group ID if they are different from the real ones. If possible, `id` also supplies the corresponding user and group names. The output might look like this:

```

$ id
+ uid=500(arnold) gid=500(arnold) groups=6(disk),7(lp),19(floppy)

```

This information is part of what is provided by `gawk`'s `PROCINFO` array (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126). However, the `id` utility provides a more palatable output than just individual numbers.

Here is a simple version of `id` written in `awk`. It uses the user database library functions (see [Section 12.5 \[Reading the User Database\]](#), page 230) and the group database library functions (see [Section 12.6 \[Reading the Group Database\]](#), page 234):

The program is fairly straightforward. All the work is done in the `BEGIN` rule. The user and group ID numbers are obtained from `PROCINFO`. The code is repetitive. The entry in the user database for the real user ID number is split into parts at the `:`. The name is the first field. Similar code is used for the effective user ID number and the group numbers:

```

# id.awk --- implement id in awk
#
# Requires user and group library functions
# output is:
# uid=12(foo) euid=34(bar) gid=3(baz) \
#           egid=5(blaf) groups=9(nine),2(two),1(one)

```

```

BEGIN    \
{
    uid = PROCINFO["uid"]
    euid = PROCINFO["euid"]
    gid = PROCINFO["gid"]
    egid = PROCINFO["egid"]

    printf("uid=%d", uid)
    pw = getpwuid(uid)
    if (pw != "") {
        split(pw, a, ":")
        printf("(%s)", a[1])
    }

    if (euid != uid) {
        printf(" euid=%d", euid)
        pw = getpwuid(euid)
        if (pw != "") {
            split(pw, a, ":")
            printf("(%s)", a[1])
        }
    }

    printf(" gid=%d", gid)
    pw = getgrgid(gid)
    if (pw != "") {
        split(pw, a, ":")
        printf("(%s)", a[1])
    }

    if (egid != gid) {
        printf(" egid=%d", egid)
        pw = getgrgid(egid)
        if (pw != "") {
            split(pw, a, ":")
            printf("(%s)", a[1])
        }
    }

    for (i = 1; ("group" i) in PROCINFO; i++) {
        if (i == 1)
            printf(" groups=")
        group = PROCINFO["group" i]
        printf("%d", group)
        pw = getgrgid(group)
        if (pw != "") {
            split(pw, a, ":")

```

```

        printf("%s", a[1])
    }
    if ("group" (i+1)) in PROCINFO
        printf(",")
}

print ""
}

```

The test in the `for` loop is worth noting. Any supplementary groups in the `PROCINFO` array have the indices `"group1"` through `"groupN"` for some  $N$ , i.e., the total number of supplementary groups. However, we don't know in advance how many of these groups there are.

This loop works by starting at one, concatenating the value with `"group"`, and then using `in` to see if that value is in the array. Eventually, `i` is incremented past the last group in the array and the loop exits.

The loop is also correct if there are *no* supplementary groups; then the condition is false the first time it's tested, and the loop body never executes.

### 13.2.4 Splitting a Large File into Pieces

The `split` program splits large text files into smaller pieces. Usage is as follows:<sup>2</sup>

```
split [-count] file [ prefix ]
```

By default, the output files are named `'xaa'`, `'xab'`, and so on. Each file has 1000 lines in it, with the likely exception of the last file. To change the number of lines in each file, supply a number on the command line preceded with a minus; e.g., `'-500'` for files with 500 lines in them instead of 1000. To change the name of the output files to something like `'myfileaa'`, `'myfileab'`, and so on, supply an additional argument that specifies the file name prefix.

Here is a version of `split` in `awk`. It uses the `ord()` and `chr()` functions presented in [Section 12.2.5 \[Translating Between Characters and Numbers\]](#), page 217.

The program first sets its defaults, and then tests to make sure there are not too many arguments. It then looks at each argument in turn. The first argument could be a minus sign followed by a number. If it is, this happens to look like a negative number, so it is made positive, and that is the count of lines. The data file name is skipped over and the final argument is used as the prefix for the output file names:

```

# split.awk --- do split in awk
#
# Requires ord() and chr() library functions
# usage: split [-num] [file] [outname]

BEGIN {
    outfile = "x"    # default
    count = 1000

```

---

<sup>2</sup> This is the traditional usage. The POSIX usage is different, but not relevant for what the program aims to demonstrate.

```

if (ARGC > 4)
    usage()

i = 1
if (ARGV[i] ~ /^-[[[:digit:]]+$/ ) {
    count = -ARGV[i]
    ARGV[i] = ""
    i++
}
# test argv in case reading from stdin instead of file
if (i in ARGV)
    i++ # skip data file name
if (i in ARGV) {
    outfile = ARGV[i]
    ARGV[i] = ""
}

s1 = s2 = "a"
out = (outfile s1 s2)
}

```

The next rule does most of the work. `tcount` (temporary count) tracks how many lines have been printed to the output file so far. If it is greater than `count`, it is time to close the current file and start a new one. `s1` and `s2` track the current suffixes for the file name. If they are both 'z', the file is just too big. Otherwise, `s1` moves to the next letter in the alphabet and `s2` starts over again at 'a':

```

{
    if (++tcount > count) {
        close(out)
        if (s2 == "z") {
            if (s1 == "z") {
                printf("split: %s is too large to split\n",
                    FILENAME) > "/dev/stderr"
                exit 1
            }
            s1 = chr(ord(s1) + 1)
            s2 = "a"
        }
        else
            s2 = chr(ord(s2) + 1)
        out = (outfile s1 s2)
        tcount = 1
    }
    print > out
}

```

The `usage()` function simply prints an error message and exits:

```
function usage( e)
```

```

{
    e = "usage: split [-num] [file] [outname]"
    print e > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}

```

The variable `e` is used so that the function fits nicely on the page.

This program is a bit sloppy; it relies on `awk` to automatically close the last file instead of doing it in an `END` rule. It also assumes that letters are contiguous in the character set, which isn't true for EBCDIC systems.

### 13.2.5 Duplicating Output into Multiple Files

The `tee` program is known as a “pipe fitting.” `tee` copies its standard input to its standard output and also duplicates it to the files named on the command line. Its usage is as follows:

```
tee [-a] file ...
```

The `-a` option tells `tee` to append to the named files, instead of truncating them and starting over.

The `BEGIN` rule first makes a copy of all the command-line arguments into an array named `copy`. `ARGV[0]` is not copied, since it is not needed. `tee` cannot use `ARGV` directly, since `awk` attempts to process each file name in `ARGV` as input data.

If the first argument is `-a`, then the flag variable `append` is set to true, and both `ARGV[1]` and `copy[1]` are deleted. If `ARGC` is less than two, then no file names were supplied and `tee` prints a usage message and exits. Finally, `awk` is forced to read the standard input by setting `ARGV[1]` to `-` and `ARGC` to two:

```

# tee.awk --- tee in awk
#
# Copy standard input to all named output files.
# Append content if -a option is supplied.
#
BEGIN    \
{
    for (i = 1; i < ARGC; i++)
        copy[i] = ARGV[i]

    if (ARGV[1] == "-a") {
        append = 1
        delete ARGV[1]
        delete copy[1]
        ARGC--
    }
    if (ARGC < 2) {
        print "usage: tee [-a] file ..." > "/dev/stderr"
        exit 1
    }
    ARGV[1] = "-"
    ARGC = 2
}

```

```
}

```

The following single rule does all the work. Since there is no pattern, it is executed for each line of input. The body of the rule simply prints the line into each file on the command line, and then to the standard output:

```
{
    # moving the if outside the loop makes it run faster
    if (append)
        for (i in copy)
            print >> copy[i]
    else
        for (i in copy)
            print > copy[i]
    print
}
```

It is also possible to write the loop this way:

```
for (i in copy)
    if (append)
        print >> copy[i]
    else
        print > copy[i]
```

This is more concise but it is also less efficient. The ‘if’ is tested for each record and for each output file. By duplicating the loop body, the ‘if’ is only tested once for each input record. If there are  $N$  input records and  $M$  output files, the first method only executes  $N$  ‘if’ statements, while the second executes  $N*M$  ‘if’ statements.

Finally, the END rule cleans up by closing all the output files:

```
END    \
{
    for (i in copy)
        close(copy[i])
}
```

### 13.2.6 Printing Nonduplicated Lines of Text

The `uniq` utility reads sorted lines of data on its standard input, and by default removes duplicate lines. In other words, it only prints unique lines—hence the name. `uniq` has a number of options. The usage is as follows:

```
uniq [-udc [-n]] [+n] [ input file [ output file ]]
```

The options for `uniq` are:

- d        Print only repeated lines.
- u        Print only nonrepeated lines.
- c        Count lines. This option overrides ‘-d’ and ‘-u’. Both repeated and nonrepeated lines are counted.
- n        Skip  $n$  fields before comparing lines. The definition of fields is similar to `awk`’s default: nonwhitespace characters separated by runs of spaces and/or TABs.

**+n** Skip *n* characters before comparing lines. Any fields specified with ‘-*n*’ are skipped first.

*input file*

Data is read from the input file named on the command line, instead of from the standard input.

*output file*

The generated output is sent to the named output file, instead of to the standard output.

Normally `uniq` behaves as if both the ‘-d’ and ‘-u’ options are provided.

`uniq` uses the `getopt()` library function (see [Section 12.4 \[Processing Command-Line Options\]](#), page 225) and the `join()` library function (see [Section 12.2.6 \[Merging an Array into a String\]](#), page 218).

The program begins with a `usage()` function and then a brief outline of the options and their meanings in comments. The `BEGIN` rule deals with the command-line arguments and options. It uses a trick to get `getopt()` to handle options of the form ‘-25’, treating such an option as the option letter ‘2’ with an argument of ‘5’. If indeed two or more digits are supplied (`Optarg` looks like a number), `Optarg` is concatenated with the option digit and then the result is added to zero to make it into a number. If there is only one digit in the option, then `Optarg` is not needed. In this case, `Optind` must be decremented so that `getopt()` processes it next time. This code is admittedly a bit tricky.

If no options are supplied, then the default is taken, to print both repeated and nonrepeated lines. The output file, if provided, is assigned to `outputfile`. Early on, `outputfile` is initialized to the standard output, ‘/dev/stdout’:

```
# uniq.awk --- do uniq in awk
#
# Requires getopt() and join() library functions

function usage( e)
{
    e = "Usage: uniq [-udc [-n]] [+n] [ in [ out ]]"
    print e > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}

# -c    count lines. overrides -d and -u
# -d    only repeated lines
# -u    only nonrepeated lines
# -n    skip n fields
# +n    skip n characters, skip fields first

BEGIN \
{
    count = 1
    outputfile = "/dev/stdout"
    opts = "udc0:1:2:3:4:5:6:7:8:9:"
```

```

while ((c = getopt(ARGC, ARGV, opts)) != -1) {
    if (c == "u")
        non_repeated_only++
    else if (c == "d")
        repeated_only++
    else if (c == "c")
        do_count++
    else if (index("0123456789", c) != 0) {
        # getopt requires args to options
        # this messes us up for things like -5
        if (Optarg ~ /^[[:digit:]]+$/)
            fcount = (c Optarg) + 0
        else {
            fcount = c + 0
            Optind--
        }
    } else
        usage()
}

if (ARGV[Optind] ~ /\^[[:digit:]]+$/) {
    charcount = substr(ARGV[Optind], 2) + 0
    Optind++
}

for (i = 1; i < Optind; i++)
    ARGV[i] = ""

if (repeated_only == 0 && non_repeated_only == 0)
    repeated_only = non_repeated_only = 1

if (ARGC - Optind == 2) {
    outputfile = ARGV[ARGC - 1]
    ARGV[ARGC - 1] = ""
}
}

```

The following function, `are_equal()`, compares the current line, `$0`, to the previous line, `last`. It handles skipping fields and characters. If no field count and no character count are specified, `are_equal()` simply returns one or zero depending upon the result of a simple string comparison of `last` and `$0`. Otherwise, things get more complicated. If fields have to be skipped, each line is broken into an array using `split()` (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\], page 149](#)); the desired fields are then joined back into a line using `join()`. The joined lines are stored in `clast` and `cline`. If no fields are skipped, `clast` and `cline` are set to `last` and `$0`, respectively. Finally, if characters are skipped, `substr()` is used to strip off the leading `charcount` characters in `clast` and `cline`. The two strings are then compared and `are_equal()` returns the result:

```

function are_equal(    n, m, clast, cline, alast, aline)
{
    if (fcount == 0 && charcount == 0)
        return (last == $0)

    if (fcount > 0) {
        n = split(last, alast)
        m = split($0, aline)
        clast = join(alast, fcount+1, n)
        cline = join(aline, fcount+1, m)
    } else {
        clast = last
        cline = $0
    }
    if (charcount) {
        clast = substr(clast, charcount + 1)
        cline = substr(cline, charcount + 1)
    }

    return (clast == cline)
}

```

The following two rules are the body of the program. The first one is executed only for the very first line of data. It sets `last` equal to `$0`, so that subsequent lines of text have something to be compared to.

The second rule does the work. The variable `equal` is one or zero, depending upon the results of `are_equal()`'s comparison. If `uniq` is counting repeated lines, and the lines are equal, then it increments the `count` variable. Otherwise, it prints the line and resets `count`, since the two lines are not equal.

If `uniq` is not counting, and if the lines are equal, `count` is incremented. Nothing is printed, since the point is to remove duplicates. Otherwise, if `uniq` is counting repeated lines and more than one line is seen, or if `uniq` is counting nonrepeated lines and only one line is seen, then the line is printed, and `count` is reset.

Finally, similar logic is used in the `END` rule to print the final line of input data:

```

NR == 1 {
    last = $0
    next
}

{
    equal = are_equal()

    if (do_count) {    # overrides -d and -u
        if (equal)
            count++
        else {
            printf("%4d %s\n", count, last) > outfile
        }
    }
}

```

```

        last = $0
        count = 1    # reset
    }
    next
}

if (equal)
    count++
else {
    if ((repeated_only && count > 1) ||
        (non_repeated_only && count == 1))
        print last > outputfile
    last = $0
    count = 1
}
}

END {
    if (do_count)
        printf("%4d %s\n", count, last) > outputfile
    else if ((repeated_only && count > 1) ||
             (non_repeated_only && count == 1))
        print last > outputfile
    close(outputfile)
}

```

### 13.2.7 Counting Things

The `wc` (word count) utility counts lines, words, and characters in one or more input files. Its usage is as follows:

```
wc [-lwc] [ files ... ]
```

If no files are specified on the command line, `wc` reads its standard input. If there are multiple files, it also prints total counts for all the files. The options and their meanings are shown in the following list:

- l        Count only lines.
- w        Count only words. A “word” is a contiguous sequence of nonwhitespace characters, separated by spaces and/or TABs. Luckily, this is the normal way `awk` separates fields in its input data.
- c        Count only characters.

Implementing `wc` in `awk` is particularly elegant, since `awk` does a lot of the work for us; it splits lines into words (i.e., fields) and counts them, it counts lines (i.e., records), and it can easily tell us how long a line is.

This program uses the `getopt()` library function (see [Section 12.4 \[Processing Command-Line Options\]](#), page 225) and the file-transition functions (see [Section 12.3.1 \[Noting Data File Boundaries\]](#), page 221).

This version has one notable difference from traditional versions of `wc`: it always prints the counts in the order lines, words, and characters. Traditional versions note the order of the `-l`, `-w`, and `-c` options on the command line, and print the counts in that order.

The `BEGIN` rule does the argument processing. The variable `print_total` is true if more than one file is named on the command line:

```
# wc.awk --- count lines, words, characters

# Options:
#  -l    only count lines
#  -w    only count words
#  -c    only count characters
#
# Default is to count lines, words, characters
#
# Requires getopt() and file transition library functions

BEGIN {
    # let getopt() print a message about
    # invalid options. we ignore them
    while ((c = getopt(ARGC, ARGV, "lwc")) != -1) {
        if (c == "l")
            do_lines = 1
        else if (c == "w")
            do_words = 1
        else if (c == "c")
            do_chars = 1
    }
    for (i = 1; i < Optind; i++)
        ARGV[i] = ""

    # if no options, do all
    if (! do_lines && ! do_words && ! do_chars)
        do_lines = do_words = do_chars = 1

    print_total = (ARGC - i > 2)
}
```

The `beginfile()` function is simple; it just resets the counts of lines, words, and characters to zero, and saves the current file name in `fname`:

```
function beginfile(file)
{
    lines = words = chars = 0
    fname = FILENAME
}
```

The `endfile()` function adds the current file's numbers to the running totals of lines, words, and characters.<sup>3</sup> It then prints out those numbers for the file that was just read. It relies on `beginfile()` to reset the numbers for the following data file:

```
function endfile(file)
{
    tlines += lines
    twords += words
    tchars += chars
    if (do_lines)
        printf "\t%d", lines
    if (do_words)
        printf "\t%d", words
    if (do_chars)
        printf "\t%d", chars
    printf "\t%s\n", fname
}
```

There is one rule that is executed for each line. It adds the length of the record, plus one, to `chars`.<sup>4</sup> Adding one plus the record length is needed because the newline character separating records (the value of `RS`) is not part of the record itself, and thus not included in its length. Next, `lines` is incremented for each line read, and `words` is incremented by the value of `NF`, which is the number of “words” on this line:

```
# do per line
{
    chars += length($0) + 1    # get newline
    lines++
    words += NF
}
```

Finally, the `END` rule simply prints the totals for all the files:

```
END {
    if (print_total) {
        if (do_lines)
            printf "\t%d", tlines
        if (do_words)
            printf "\t%d", twords
        if (do_chars)
            printf "\t%d", tchars
        print "\ttotal"
    }
}
```

<sup>3</sup> `wc` can't just use the value of `FNR` in `endfile()`. If you examine the code in [Section 12.3.1 \[Noting Data File Boundaries\]](#), page 221, you will see that `FNR` has already been reset by the time `endfile()` is called.

<sup>4</sup> Since `gawk` understands multibyte locales, this code counts characters, not bytes.

### 13.3 A Grab Bag of awk Programs

This section is a large “grab bag” of miscellaneous programs. We hope you find them both interesting and enjoyable.

#### 13.3.1 Finding Duplicated Words in a Document

A common error when writing large amounts of prose is to accidentally duplicate words. Typically you will see this in text as something like “the the program does the following. . .” When the text is online, often the duplicated words occur at the end of one line and the the beginning of another, making them very difficult to spot.

This program, ‘dupword.awk’, scans through a file one line at a time and looks for adjacent occurrences of the same word. It also saves the last word on a line (in the variable `prev`) for comparison with the first word on the next line.

The first two statements make sure that the line is all lowercase, so that, for example, “The” and “the” compare equal to each other. The next statement replaces nonalphanumeric and nonwhitespace characters with spaces, so that punctuation does not affect the comparison either. The characters are replaced with spaces so that formatting controls don’t create nonsense words (e.g., the Texinfo ‘@code{NF}’ becomes ‘codeNF’ if punctuation is simply deleted). The record is then resplit into fields, yielding just the actual words on the line, and ensuring that there are no empty fields.

If there are no fields left after removing all the punctuation, the current record is skipped. Otherwise, the program loops through each word, comparing it to the previous one:

```
# dupword.awk --- find duplicate words in text
{
    $0 = tolower($0)
    gsub(/[^[:alnum:][:blank:]]/, " ");
    $0 = $0          # re-split
    if (NF == 0)
        next
    if ($1 == prev)
        printf("%s:%d: duplicate %s\n",
              FILENAME, FNR, $1)
    for (i = 2; i <= NF; i++)
        if ($i == $(i-1))
            printf("%s:%d: duplicate %s\n",
                  FILENAME, FNR, $i)
    prev = $NF
}
```

#### 13.3.2 An Alarm Clock Program

*Nothing cures insomnia like a ringing alarm clock.*

Arnold Robbins

The following program is a simple “alarm clock” program. You give it a time of day and an optional message. At the specified time, it prints the message on the standard output. In addition, you can give it the number of times to repeat the message as well as a delay between repetitions.

This program uses the `gettimeofday()` function from [Section 12.2.7 \[Managing the Time of Day\]](#), page 219.

All the work is done in the `BEGIN` rule. The first part is argument checking and setting of defaults: the delay, the count, and the message to print. If the user supplied a message without the ASCII BEL character (known as the “alert” character, `"\a"`), then it is added to the message. (On many systems, printing the ASCII BEL generates an audible alert. Thus when the alarm goes off, the system calls attention to itself in case the user is not looking at the computer.) Just for a change, this program uses a `switch` statement (see [Section 7.4.5 \[The switch Statement\]](#), page 121), but the processing could be done with a series of `if-else` statements instead. Here is the program:

```
# alarm.awk --- set an alarm
#
# Requires gettimeofday() library function
# usage: alarm time [ "message" [ count [ delay ] ] ]

BEGIN    \
{
    # Initial argument sanity checking
    usage1 = "usage: alarm time ['message' [count [delay]]]"
    usage2 = sprintf("\t(%s) time ::= hh:mm", ARGV[1])

    if (ARGC < 2) {
        print usage1 > "/dev/stderr"
        print usage2 > "/dev/stderr"
        exit 1
    }
    switch (ARGC) {
    case 5:
        delay = ARGV[4] + 0
        # fall through
    case 4:
        count = ARGV[3] + 0
        # fall through
    case 3:
        message = ARGV[2]
        break
    default:
        if (ARGV[1] !~ /^[[:digit:]]?[[[:digit:]]:[:digit:]]{2}/) {
            print usage1 > "/dev/stderr"
            print usage2 > "/dev/stderr"
            exit 1
        }
        break
    }
}

# set defaults for once we reach the desired time
```

```

if (delay == 0)
    delay = 180    # 3 minutes
if (count == 0)
    count = 5
if (message == "")
    message = sprintf("\aIt is now %s!\a", ARGV[1])
else if (index(message, "\a") == 0)
    message = "\a" message "\a"

```

The next section of code turns the alarm time into hours and minutes, converts it (if necessary) to a 24-hour clock, and then turns that time into a count of the seconds since midnight. Next it turns the current time into a count of seconds since midnight. The difference between the two is how long to wait before setting off the alarm:

```

# split up alarm time
split(ARGV[1], atime, ":")
hour = atime[1] + 0    # force numeric
minute = atime[2] + 0 # force numeric

# get current broken down time
gettimeofday(now)

# if time given is 12-hour hours and it's after that
# hour, e.g., 'alarm 5:30' at 9 a.m. means 5:30 p.m.,
# then add 12 to real hour
if (hour < 12 && now["hour"] > hour)
    hour += 12

# set target time in seconds since midnight
target = (hour * 60 * 60) + (minute * 60)

# get current time in seconds since midnight
current = (now["hour"] * 60 * 60) + \
    (now["minute"] * 60) + now["second"]

# how long to sleep for
naptime = target - current
if (naptime <= 0) {
    print "time is in the past!" > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}

```

Finally, the program uses the `system()` function (see [Section 9.1.4 \[Input/Output Functions\]](#), page 160) to call the `sleep` utility. The `sleep` utility simply pauses for the given number of seconds. If the exit status is not zero, the program assumes that `sleep` was interrupted and exits. If `sleep` exited with an OK status (zero), then the program prints the message in a loop, again using `sleep` to delay for however many seconds are necessary:

```

# zzzzzz..... go away if interrupted
if (system(sprintf("sleep %d", naptime)) != 0)

```

```

        exit 1

    # time to notify!
    command = sprintf("sleep %d", delay)
    for (i = 1; i <= count; i++) {
        print message
        # if sleep command interrupted, go away
        if (system(command) != 0)
            break
    }

    exit 0
}

```

### 13.3.3 Transliterating Characters

The system `tr` utility transliterates characters. For example, it is often used to map uppercase letters into lowercase for further processing:

```
generate data | tr 'A-Z' 'a-z' | process data ...
```

`tr` requires two lists of characters.<sup>5</sup> When processing the input, the first character in the first list is replaced with the first character in the second list, the second character in the first list is replaced with the second character in the second list, and so on. If there are more characters in the “from” list than in the “to” list, the last character of the “to” list is used for the remaining characters in the “from” list.

Some time ago, a user proposed that a transliteration function should be added to `gawk`. The following program was written to prove that character transliteration could be done with a user-level function. This program is not as complete as the system `tr` utility but it does most of the job.

The `translate` program demonstrates one of the few weaknesses of standard `awk`: dealing with individual characters is very painful, requiring repeated use of the `substr()`, `index()`, and `gsub()` built-in functions (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), [page 149](#)).<sup>6</sup> There are two functions. The first, `stranslate()`, takes three arguments:

**from**      A list of characters from which to translate.  
**to**         A list of characters to which to translate.  
**target**     The string on which to do the translation.

Associative arrays make the translation part fairly easy. `t_ar` holds the “to” characters, indexed by the “from” characters. Then a simple loop goes through `from`, one character at a time. For each character in `from`, if the character appears in `target`, it is replaced with the corresponding `to` character.

<sup>5</sup> On some older systems, `tr` may require that the lists be written as range expressions enclosed in square brackets (`'[a-z]'`) and quoted, to prevent the shell from attempting a file name expansion. This is not a feature.

<sup>6</sup> This program was written before `gawk` acquired the ability to split each character in a string into separate array elements.

The `translate()` function simply calls `stranslate()` using `$0` as the target. The main program sets two global variables, `FROM` and `TO`, from the command line, and then changes `ARGV` so that `awk` reads from the standard input.

Finally, the processing rule simply calls `translate()` for each record:

```
# translate.awk --- do tr-like stuff
# Bugs: does not handle things like: tr A-Z a-z, it has
# to be spelled out. However, if 'to' is shorter than 'from',
# the last character in 'to' is used for the rest of 'from'.

function stranslate(from, to, target,      lf, lt, ltarget, t_ar, i, c,
                    result)
{
    lf = length(from)
    lt = length(to)
    ltarget = length(target)
    for (i = 1; i <= lt; i++)
        t_ar[substr(from, i, 1)] = substr(to, i, 1)
    if (lt < lf)
        for (; i <= lf; i++)
            t_ar[substr(from, i, 1)] = substr(to, lt, 1)
    for (i = 1; i <= ltarget; i++) {
        c = substr(target, i, 1)
        if (c in t_ar)
            c = t_ar[c]
        result = result c
    }
    return result
}

function translate(from, to)
{
    return $0 = stranslate(from, to, $0)
}

# main program
BEGIN {
    if (ARGC < 3) {
        print "usage: translate from to" > "/dev/stderr"
        exit
    }
    FROM = ARGV[1]
    TO = ARGV[2]
    ARGC = 2
    ARGV[1] = "-"
}
```

```

{
    translate(FROM, TO)
    print
}

```

While it is possible to do character transliteration in a user-level function, it is not necessarily efficient, and we (the `gawk` authors) started to consider adding a built-in function. However, shortly after writing this program, we learned that the System V Release 4 `awk` had added the `toupper()` and `tolower()` functions (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). These functions handle the vast majority of the cases where character transliteration is necessary, and so we chose to simply add those functions to `gawk` as well and then leave well enough alone.

An obvious improvement to this program would be to set up the `t_ar` array only once, in a `BEGIN` rule. However, this assumes that the “from” and “to” lists will never change throughout the lifetime of the program.

### 13.3.4 Printing Mailing Labels

Here is a “real world”<sup>7</sup> program. This script reads lists of names and addresses and generates mailing labels. Each page of labels has 20 labels on it, two across and 10 down. The addresses are guaranteed to be no more than five lines of data. Each address is separated from the next by a blank line.

The basic idea is to read 20 labels worth of data. Each line of each label is stored in the `line` array. The single rule takes care of filling the `line` array and printing the page when 20 labels have been read.

The `BEGIN` rule simply sets `RS` to the empty string, so that `awk` splits records at blank lines (see [Section 4.1 \[How Input Is Split into Records\]](#), page 49). It sets `MAXLINES` to 100, since 100 is the maximum number of lines on the page ( $20 * 5 = 100$ ).

Most of the work is done in the `printpage()` function. The label lines are stored sequentially in the `line` array. But they have to print horizontally; `line[1]` next to `line[6]`, `line[2]` next to `line[7]`, and so on. Two loops are used to accomplish this. The outer loop, controlled by `i`, steps through every 10 lines of data; this is each row of labels. The inner loop, controlled by `j`, goes through the lines within the row. As `j` goes from 0 to 4, ‘`i+j`’ is the `j`-th line in the row, and ‘`i+j+5`’ is the entry next to it. The output ends up looking something like this:

```

line 1          line 6
line 2          line 7
line 3          line 8
line 4          line 9
line 5          line 10
...

```

The `printf` format string ‘`%-41s`’ left-aligns the data and prints it within a fixed-width field.

As a final note, an extra blank line is printed at lines 21 and 61, to keep the output lined up on the labels. This is dependent on the particular brand of labels in use when the

<sup>7</sup> “Real world” is defined as “a program actually used to get something done.”

program was written. You will also note that there are two blank lines at the top and two blank lines at the bottom.

The END rule arranges to flush the final page of labels; there may not have been an even multiple of 20 labels in the data:

```
# labels.awk --- print mailing labels

# Each label is 5 lines of data that may have blank lines.
# The label sheets have 2 blank lines at the top and 2 at
# the bottom.

BEGIN    { RS = "" ; MAXLINES = 100 }

function printpage(    i, j)
{
    if (Nlines <= 0)
        return

    printf "\n\n"        # header

    for (i = 1; i <= Nlines; i += 10) {
        if (i == 21 || i == 61)
            print ""
        for (j = 0; j < 5; j++) {
            if (i + j > MAXLINES)
                break
            printf "    %-41s %s\n", line[i+j], line[i+j+5]
        }
        print ""
    }

    printf "\n\n"        # footer

    delete line
}

# main rule
{
    if (Count >= 20) {
        printpage()
        Count = 0
        Nlines = 0
    }
    n = split($0, a, "\n")
    for (i = 1; i <= n; i++)
        line[++Nlines] = a[i]
    for (; i <= 5; i++)
```

```

        line[++Nlines] = ""
    Count++
}

END \
{
    printpage()
}

```

### 13.3.5 Generating Word-Usage Counts

When working with large amounts of text, it can be interesting to know how often different words appear. For example, an author may overuse certain words, in which case she might wish to find synonyms to substitute for words that appear too often. This subsection develops a program for counting words and presenting the frequency information in a useful format.

At first glance, a program like this would seem to do the job:

```

# Print list of word frequencies

{
    for (i = 1; i <= NF; i++)
        freq[$i]++
}

END {
    for (word in freq)
        printf "%s\t%d\n", word, freq[word]
}

```

The program relies on `awk`'s default field splitting mechanism to break each line up into “words,” and uses an associative array named `freq`, indexed by each word, to count the number of times the word occurs. In the `END` rule, it prints the counts.

This program has several problems that prevent it from being useful on real text files:

- The `awk` language considers upper- and lowercase characters to be distinct. Therefore, “bartender” and “Bartender” are not treated as the same word. This is undesirable, since in normal text, words are capitalized if they begin sentences, and a frequency analyzer should not be sensitive to capitalization.
- Words are detected using the `awk` convention that fields are separated just by white-space. Other characters in the input (except newlines) don't have any special meaning to `awk`. This means that punctuation characters count as part of words.
- The output does not come out in any useful order. You're more likely to be interested in which words occur most frequently or in having an alphabetized table of how frequently each word occurs.

The first problem can be solved by using `tolower()` to remove case distinctions. The second problem can be solved by using `gsub()` to remove punctuation characters. Finally, we solve the third problem by using the system `sort` utility to process the output of the `awk` script. Here is the new version of the program:

```

# wordfreq.awk --- print list of word frequencies

{
    $0 = tolower($0)    # remove case distinctions
    # remove punctuation
    gsub(/[^\[:alnum:]\_[:blank:]]/, "", $0)
    for (i = 1; i <= NF; i++)
        freq[$i]++
}

END {
    for (word in freq)
        printf "%s\t%d\n", word, freq[word]
}

```

Assuming we have saved this program in a file named ‘wordfreq.awk’, and that the data is in ‘file1’, the following pipeline:

```
awk -f wordfreq.awk file1 | sort -k 2nr
```

produces a table of the words appearing in ‘file1’ in order of decreasing frequency.

The `awk` program suitably massages the data and produces a word frequency table, which is not ordered. The `awk` script’s output is then sorted by the `sort` utility and printed on the screen.

The options given to `sort` specify a sort that uses the second field of each input line (skipping one field), that the sort keys should be treated as numeric quantities (otherwise ‘15’ would come before ‘5’), and that the sorting should be done in descending (reverse) order.

The `sort` could even be done from within the program, by changing the `END` action to:

```

END {
    sort = "sort -k 2nr"
    for (word in freq)
        printf "%s\t%d\n", word, freq[word] | sort
    close(sort)
}

```

This way of sorting must be used on systems that do not have true pipes at the command-line (or batch-file) level. See the general operating system documentation for more information on how to use the `sort` program.

### 13.3.6 Removing Duplicates from Unsorted Text

The `uniq` program (see [Section 13.2.6 \[Printing Nonduplicated Lines of Text\], page 255](#)), removes duplicate lines from *sorted* data.

Suppose, however, you need to remove duplicate lines from a data file but that you want to preserve the order the lines are in. A good example of this might be a shell history file. The history file keeps a copy of all the commands you have entered, and it is not unusual to repeat a command several times in a row. Occasionally you might want to compact the history by removing duplicate entries. Yet it is desirable to maintain the order of the original commands.

This simple program does the job. It uses two arrays. The `data` array is indexed by the text of each line. For each line, `data[$0]` is incremented. If a particular line has not been seen before, then `data[$0]` is zero. In this case, the text of the line is stored in `lines[count]`. Each element of `lines` is a unique command, and the indices of `lines` indicate the order in which those lines are encountered. The `END` rule simply prints out the lines, in order:

```
# histsort.awk --- compact a shell history file
# Thanks to Byron Rakitzis for the general idea

{
    if (data[$0]++ == 0)
        lines[++count] = $0
}

END {
    for (i = 1; i <= count; i++)
        print lines[i]
}
```

This program also provides a foundation for generating other useful information. For example, using the following `print` statement in the `END` rule indicates how often a particular command is used:

```
print data[lines[i]], lines[i]
```

This works because `data[$0]` is incremented each time a line is seen.

### 13.3.7 Extracting Programs from Texinfo Source Files

Both this chapter and the previous chapter (Chapter 12 [A Library of awk Functions], page 211) present a large number of `awk` programs. If you want to experiment with these programs, it is tedious to have to type them in by hand. Here we present a program that can extract parts of a Texinfo input file into separate files.

This book is written in `Texinfo`, the GNU project’s document formatting language. A single Texinfo source file can be used to produce both printed and online documentation. Texinfo is fully documented in the book *Texinfo—The GNU Documentation Format*, available from the Free Software Foundation.

For our purposes, it is enough to know three things about Texinfo input files:

- The “at” symbol (`@`) is special in Texinfo, much as the backslash (`\`) is in C or `awk`. Literal `@` symbols are represented in Texinfo source files as `@@`.
- Comments start with either `@c` or `@comment`. The file-extraction program works by using special comments that start at the beginning of a line.
- Lines containing `@group` and `@end group` commands bracket example text that should not be split across a page boundary. (Unfortunately, `TeX` isn’t always smart enough to do things exactly right, so we have to give it some help.)

The following program, `extract.awk`, reads through a Texinfo source file and does two things, based on the special comments. Upon seeing `@c system ...`, it runs a command, by extracting the command text from the control line and passing it on to the

`system()` function (see [Section 9.1.4 \[Input/Output Functions\]](#), page 160). Upon seeing `@c file filename`, each subsequent line is sent to the file `filename`, until `@c endfile` is encountered. The rules in `extract.awk` match either `@c` or `@comment` by letting the `omment` part be optional. Lines containing `@group` and `@end group` are simply removed. `extract.awk` uses the `join()` library function (see [Section 12.2.6 \[Merging an Array into a String\]](#), page 218).

The example programs in the online Texinfo source for *GAWK: Effective AWK Programming* (`gawk.texi`) have all been bracketed inside `file` and `endfile` lines. The `gawk` distribution uses a copy of `extract.awk` to extract the sample programs and install many of them in a standard directory where `gawk` can find them. The Texinfo file looks something like this:

```
...
This program has a @code{BEGIN} rule,
that prints a nice message:
```

```
@example
@c file examples/messages.awk
BEGIN @ { print "Don't panic!" @ }
@c end file
@end example
```

It also prints some final advice:

```
@example
@c file examples/messages.awk
END @ { print "Always avoid bored archeologists!" @ }
@c end file
@end example
...
```

`extract.awk` begins by setting `IGNORECASE` to one, so that mixed upper- and lowercase letters in the directives won't matter.

The first rule handles calling `system()`, checking that a command is given (`NF` is at least three) and also checking that the command exits with a zero exit status, signifying OK:

```
# extract.awk --- extract files and run programs
#                from texinfo files

BEGIN    { IGNORECASE = 1 }

/~/@c(omment)?[ \t]+system/  \
{
    if (NF < 3) {
        e = (FILENAME ":" FNR)
        e = (e ": badly formed 'system' line")
        print e > "/dev/stderr"
        next
    }
}
```

```

$1 = ""
$2 = ""
stat = system($0)
if (stat != 0) {
    e = (FILENAME ":" FNR)
    e = (e ": warning: system returned " stat)
    print e > "/dev/stderr"
}
}

```

The variable `e` is used so that the rule fits nicely on the page.

The second rule handles moving data into files. It verifies that a file name is given in the directive. If the file named is not the current file, then the current file is closed. Keeping the current file open until a new file is encountered allows the use of the `>` redirection for printing the contents, keeping open file management simple.

The `for` loop does the work. It reads lines using `getline` (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with `getline`\]](#), page 67). For an unexpected end of file, it calls the `unexpected_eof()` function. If the line is an “endfile” line, then it breaks out of the loop. If the line is an `@group` or `@end group` line, then it ignores it and goes on to the next line. Similarly, comments within examples are also ignored.

Most of the work is in the following few lines. If the line has no `@` symbols, the program can print it directly. Otherwise, each leading `@` must be stripped off. To remove the `@` symbols, the line is split into separate elements of the array `a`, using the `split()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). The `@` symbol is used as the separator character. Each element of `a` that is empty indicates two successive `@` symbols in the original line. For each two empty elements (`@@` in the original file), we have to add a single `@` symbol back in.<sup>8</sup>

When the processing of the array is finished, `join()` is called with the value of `SUBSEP`, to rejoin the pieces back into a single line. That line is then printed to the output file:

```

/^@c(omment)?[ \t]+file/ \
{
    if (NF != 3) {
        e = (FILENAME ":" FNR ": badly formed 'file' line")
        print e > "/dev/stderr"
        next
    }
    if ($3 != curfile) {
        if (curfile != "")
            close(curfile)
        curfile = $3
    }

    for (;;) {
        if ((getline line) <= 0)

```

---

<sup>8</sup> This program was written before `gawk` had the `gensub()` function. Consider how you might use it to simplify the code.

```

        unexpected_eof()
    if (line ~ /^@c(omment)?[ \t]+endfile/)
        break
    else if (line ~ /^@(end[ \t]+)?group/)
        continue
    else if (line ~ /^@c(omment+)?[ \t]+/)
        continue
    if (index(line, "@") == 0) {
        print line > curfile
        continue
    }
    n = split(line, a, "@")
    # if a[1] == "", means leading @,
    # don't add one back in.
    for (i = 2; i <= n; i++) {
        if (a[i] == "") { # was an @@
            a[i] = "@"
            if (a[i+1] == "")
                i++
        }
    }
    print join(a, 1, n, SUBSEP) > curfile
}
}

```

An important thing to note is the use of the ‘>’ redirection. Output done with ‘>’ only opens the file once; it stays open and subsequent output is appended to the file (see [Section 5.6 \[Redirecting Output of print and printf\], page 81](#)). This makes it easy to mix program text and explanatory prose for the same sample source file (as has been done here!) without any hassle. The file is only closed when a new data file name is encountered or at the end of the input file.

Finally, the function `unexpected_eof()` prints an appropriate error message and then exits. The `END` rule handles the final cleanup, closing the open file:

```

function unexpected_eof()
{
    printf("%s:%d: unexpected EOF or error\n",
        FILENAME, FNR) > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}

END {
    if (curfile)
        close(curfile)
}

```

### 13.3.8 A Simple Stream Editor

The `sed` utility is a stream editor, a program that reads a stream of data, makes changes to it, and passes it on. It is often used to make global changes to a large file or to a stream of data generated by a pipeline of commands. While `sed` is a complicated program in its own right, its most common use is to perform global substitutions in the middle of a pipeline:

```
command1 < orig.data | sed 's/old/new/g' | command2 > result
```

Here, `'s/old/new/g'` tells `sed` to look for the regexp `'old'` on each input line and globally replace it with the text `'new'`, i.e., all the occurrences on a line. This is similar to `awk`'s `gsub()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149).

The following program, `'awksed.awk'`, accepts at least two command-line arguments: the pattern to look for and the text to replace it with. Any additional arguments are treated as data file names to process. If none are provided, the standard input is used:

```
# awksed.awk --- do s/foo/bar/g using just print
#   Thanks to Michael Brennan for the idea

function usage()
{
    print "usage: awksed pat repl [files...]" > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}

BEGIN {
    # validate arguments
    if (ARGC < 3)
        usage()

    RS = ARGV[1]
    ORS = ARGV[2]

    # don't use arguments as files
    ARGV[1] = ARGV[2] = ""
}

# look ma, no hands!
{
    if (RT == "")
        printf "%s", $0
    else
        print
}
}
```

The program relies on `gawk`'s ability to have `RS` be a regexp, as well as on the setting of `RT` to the actual text that terminates the record (see [Section 4.1 \[How Input Is Split into Records\]](#), page 49).

The idea is to have `RS` be the pattern to look for. `gawk` automatically sets `$0` to the text between matches of the pattern. This is text that we want to keep, unmodified. Then, by

setting `ORS` to the replacement text, a simple `print` statement outputs the text we want to keep, followed by the replacement text.

There is one wrinkle to this scheme, which is what to do if the last record doesn't end with text that matches `RS`. Using a `print` statement unconditionally prints the replacement text, which is not correct. However, if the file did not end in text that matches `RS`, `RT` is set to the null string. In this case, we can print `$0` using `printf` (see [Section 5.5 \[Using printf Statements for Fancier Printing\]](#), page 76).

The `BEGIN` rule handles the setup, checking for the right number of arguments and calling `usage()` if there is a problem. Then it sets `RS` and `ORS` from the command-line arguments and sets `ARGV[1]` and `ARGV[2]` to the null string, so that they are not treated as file names (see [Section 7.5.3 \[Using ARGV and ARGV\]](#), page 133).

The `usage()` function prints an error message and exits. Finally, the single rule handles the printing scheme outlined above, using `print` or `printf` as appropriate, depending upon the value of `RT`.

### 13.3.9 An Easy Way to Use Library Functions

In [Section 2.7 \[Including Other Files Into Your Program\]](#), page 34, we saw how `gawk` provides a built-in file-inclusion capability. However, this is a `gawk` extension. This section provides the motivation for making file inclusion available for standard `awk`, and shows how to do it using a combination of shell and `awk` programming.

Using library functions in `awk` can be very beneficial. It encourages code reuse and the writing of general functions. Programs are smaller and therefore clearer. However, using library functions is only easy when writing `awk` programs; it is painful when running them, requiring multiple `-f` options. If `gawk` is unavailable, then so too is the `AWKPATH` environment variable and the ability to put `awk` functions into a library directory (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25). It would be nice to be able to write programs in the following manner:

```
# library functions
@include getopt.awk
@include join.awk
...

# main program
BEGIN {
    while ((c = getopt(ARGC, ARGV, "a:b:cde")) != -1)
        ...
    ...
}
```

The following program, `igawk.sh`, provides this service. It simulates `gawk`'s searching of the `AWKPATH` variable and also allows *nested* includes; i.e., a file that is included with `@include` can contain further `@include` statements. `igawk` makes an effort to only include files once, so that nested includes don't accidentally include a library function twice.

`igawk` should behave just like `gawk` externally. This means it should accept all of `gawk`'s command-line arguments, including the ability to have multiple source files specified via `-f`, and the ability to mix command-line and library source files.

The program is written using the POSIX Shell (`sh`) command language.<sup>9</sup> It works as follows:

1. Loop through the arguments, saving anything that doesn't represent `awk` source code for later, when the expanded program is run.
2. For any arguments that do represent `awk` text, put the arguments into a shell variable that will be expanded. There are two cases:
  - a. Literal text, provided with `--source` or `--source=`. This text is just appended directly.
  - b. Source file names, provided with `-f`. We use a neat trick and append `@include filename` to the shell variable's contents. Since the file-inclusion program works the way `gawk` does, this gets the text of the file included into the program at the correct point.
3. Run an `awk` program (naturally) over the shell variable's contents to expand `@include` statements. The expanded program is placed in a second shell variable.
4. Run the expanded program with `gawk` and any other original command-line arguments that the user supplied (such as the data file names).

This program uses shell variables extensively: for storing command-line arguments, the text of the `awk` program that will expand the user's program, for the user's original program, and for the expanded program. Doing so removes some potential problems that might arise were we to use temporary files instead, at the cost of making the script somewhat more complicated.

The initial part of the program turns on shell tracing if the first argument is `debug`.

The next part loops through all the command-line arguments. There are several cases of interest:

- This ends the arguments to `igawk`. Anything else should be passed on to the user's `awk` program without being evaluated.
- W This indicates that the next option is specific to `gawk`. To make argument processing easier, the `-W` is appended to the front of the remaining arguments and the loop continues. (This is an `sh` programming trick. Don't worry about it if you are not familiar with `sh`.)
- v, -F These are saved and passed on to `gawk`.
- f, --file, --file=, -Wfile= The file name is appended to the shell variable `program` with an `@include` statement. The `expr` utility is used to remove the leading option part of the argument (e.g., `--file=`). (Typical `sh` usage would be to use the `echo` and `sed` utilities to do this work. Unfortunately, some versions of `echo` evaluate escape sequences in their arguments, possibly mangling the program text. Using `expr` avoids this problem.)
- source, --source=, -Wsource= The source text is appended to `program`.

---

<sup>9</sup> Fully explaining the `sh` language is beyond the scope of this book. We provide some minimal explanations, but see a good shell programming book if you wish to understand things in more depth.

`--version`, `-Wversion`

`igawk` prints its version number, runs `'gawk --version'` to get the `gawk` version information, and then exits.

If none of the `'-f'`, `'--file'`, `'-Wfile'`, `'--source'`, or `'-Wsource'` arguments are supplied, then the first nonoption argument should be the `awk` program. If there are no command-line arguments left, `igawk` prints an error message and exits. Otherwise, the first argument is appended to `program`. In any case, after the arguments have been processed, `program` contains the complete text of the original `awk` program.

The program is as follows:

```
#!/bin/sh
# igawk --- like gawk but do @include processing

if [ "$1" = debug ]
then
    set -x
    shift
fi

# A literal newline, so that program text is formatted correctly
n='
'

# Initialize variables to empty
program=
opts=

while [ $# -ne 0 ] # loop over arguments
do
    case $1 in
        --)    shift
              break ;;

        -W)    shift
              # The ${x?'message here'} construct prints a
              # diagnostic if $x is the null string
              set -- -W"${@?'missing operand'}"
              continue ;;

        -[vF])  opts="$opts $1 '${2?'missing operand'}'"
              shift ;;

        -[vF]*)  opts="$opts '$1'" ;;

        -f)    program="$program$n@include ${2?'missing operand'}"
              shift ;;
```

```

-f*)    f=$(expr "$1" : '-f\(.*\)\')
        program="$program$n@include $f" ;;

-[W-]file=*)
        f=$(expr "$1" : '-.file=\(.*\)\')
        program="$program$n@include $f" ;;

-[W-]file)
        program="$program$n@include ${2?'missing operand'}"
        shift ;;

-[W-]source=*)
        t=$(expr "$1" : '-.source=\(.*\)\')
        program="$program$n$t" ;;

-[W-]source)
        program="$program$n${2?'missing operand'}"
        shift ;;

-[W-]version)
        echo igawk: version 3.0 1>&2
        gawk --version
        exit 0 ;;

-[W-]*)  opts="$opts '$1'" ;;

*)      break ;;
esac
shift
done

if [ -z "$program" ]
then
    program=${1?'missing program'}
    shift
fi

# At this point, 'program' has the program.

```

The awk program to process '@include' directives is stored in the shell variable `expand_prog`. Doing this keeps the shell script readable. The awk program reads through the user's program, one line at a time, using `getline` (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with getline\]](#), [page 67](#)). The input file names and '@include' statements are managed using a stack. As each '@include' is encountered, the current file name is "pushed" onto the stack and the file named in the '@include' directive becomes the current file name. As each file is finished, the stack is "popped," and the previous input file becomes the current input file again. The process is started by making the original file the first one on the stack.

The `pathto()` function does the work of finding the full path to a file. It simulates `gawk`'s behavior when searching the `AWKPATH` environment variable (see [Section 2.5.1 \[The AWKPATH Environment Variable\]](#), page 32). If a file name has a `'/'` in it, no path search is done. Similarly, if the file name is `"-"`, then that string is used as-is. Otherwise, the file name is concatenated with the name of each directory in the path, and an attempt is made to open the generated file name. The only way to test if a file can be read in `awk` is to go ahead and try to read it with `getline`; this is what `pathto()` does.<sup>10</sup> If the file can be read, it is closed and the file name is returned:

```
expand_prog='

function pathto(file,    i, t, junk)
{
    if (index(file, "/") != 0)
        return file

    if (file == "-")
        return file

    for (i = 1; i <= ndirs; i++) {
        t = (pathlist[i] "/" file)
        if ((getline junk < t) > 0) {
            # found it
            close(t)
            return t
        }
    }
    return ""
}
```

The main program is contained inside one `BEGIN` rule. The first thing it does is set up the `pathlist` array that `pathto()` uses. After splitting the path on `':'`, null elements are replaced with `"."`, which represents the current directory:

```
BEGIN {
    path = ENVIRON["AWKPATH"]
    ndirs = split(path, pathlist, ":")
    for (i = 1; i <= ndirs; i++) {
        if (pathlist[i] == "")
            pathlist[i] = "."
    }
}
```

The stack is initialized with `ARGV[1]`, which will be `'/dev/stdin'`. The main loop comes next. Input lines are read in succession. Lines that do not start with `@include` are printed verbatim. If the line does start with `@include`, the file name is in `$2`. `pathto()` is called to generate the full path. If it cannot, then the program prints an error message and continues.

---

<sup>10</sup> On some very old versions of `awk`, the test `'getline junk < t'` can loop forever if the file exists but is empty. Caveat emptor.

The next thing to check is if the file is included already. The `processed` array is indexed by the full file name of each included file and it tracks this information for us. If the file is seen again, a warning message is printed. Otherwise, the new file name is pushed onto the stack and processing continues.

Finally, when `getline` encounters the end of the input file, the file is closed and the stack is popped. When `stackptr` is less than zero, the program is done:

```

stackptr = 0
input[stackptr] = ARGV[1] # ARGV[1] is first file

for (; stackptr >= 0; stackptr--) {
    while ((getline < input[stackptr]) > 0) {
        if (tolower($1) != "@include") {
            print
            continue
        }
        fpath = pathto($2)
        if (fpath == "") {
            printf("igawk:%s:%d: cannot find %s\n",
                input[stackptr], FNR, $2) > "/dev/stderr"
            continue
        }
        if (!(fpath in processed)) {
            processed[fpath] = input[stackptr]
            input[++stackptr] = fpath # push onto stack
        } else
            print $2, "included in", input[stackptr],
                "already included in",
                processed[fpath] > "/dev/stderr"
        }
        close(input[stackptr])
    }
} # close quote ends 'expand_prog' variable

processed_program=$(gawk -- "$expand_prog" /dev/stdin << EOF
$program
EOF
)

```

The shell construct '`command << marker`' is called a *here document*. Everything in the shell script up to the *marker* is fed to *command* as input. The shell processes the contents of the here document for variable and command substitution (and possibly other things as well, depending upon the shell).

The shell construct '`$(...)`' is called *command substitution*. The output of the command inside the parentheses is substituted into the command line. Because the result is used in a variable assignment, it is saved as a single string, even if the results contain whitespace.

The expanded program is saved in the variable `processed_program`. It's done in these steps:

1. Run `gawk` with the `@include`-processing program (the value of the `expand_prog` shell variable) on standard input.
2. Standard input is the contents of the user's program, from the shell variable `program`. Its contents are fed to `gawk` via a here document.
3. The results of this processing are saved in the shell variable `processed_program` by using command substitution.

The last step is to call `gawk` with the expanded program, along with the original options and command-line arguments that the user supplied.

```
eval gawk $opts -- "$processed_program" "$@"
```

The `eval` command is a shell construct that reruns the shell's parsing process. This keeps things properly quoted.

This version of `igawk` represents my fifth version of this program. There are four key simplifications that make the program work better:

- Using `@include` even for the files named with `-f` makes building the initial collected `awk` program much simpler; all the `@include` processing can be done once.
- Not trying to save the line read with `getline` in the `path_to()` function when testing for the file's accessibility for use with the main program simplifies things considerably.
- Using a `getline` loop in the `BEGIN` rule does it all in one place. It is not necessary to call out to a separate loop for processing nested `@include` statements.
- Instead of saving the expanded program in a temporary file, putting it in a shell variable avoids some potential security problems. This has the disadvantage that the script relies upon more features of the `sh` language, making it harder to follow for those who aren't familiar with `sh`.

Also, this program illustrates that it is often worthwhile to combine `sh` and `awk` programming together. You can usually accomplish quite a lot, without having to resort to low-level programming in C or C++, and it is frequently easier to do certain kinds of string and argument manipulation using the shell than it is in `awk`.

Finally, `igawk` shows that it is not always necessary to add new features to a program; they can often be layered on top.

As an additional example of this, consider the idea of having two files in a directory in the search path:

`'default.awk'`

This file contains a set of default library functions, such as `getopt()` and `assert()`.

`'site.awk'`

This file contains library functions that are specific to a site or installation; i.e., locally developed functions. Having a separate file allows `'default.awk'` to change with new `gawk` releases, without requiring the system administrator to update it each time by adding the local functions.

One user suggested that `gawk` be modified to automatically read these files upon startup. Instead, it would be very simple to modify `igawk` to do this. Since `igawk` can process nested `@include` directives, `default.awk` could simply contain `@include` statements for the desired library functions.

### 13.3.10 Finding Anagrams From A Dictionary

An interesting programming challenge is to search for *anagrams* in a word list (such as `/usr/share/dict/words` on many GNU/Linux systems). One word is an anagram of another if both words contain the same letters (for example, “babbling” and “blabbing”).

An elegant algorithm is presented in Column 2, Problem C of Jon Bentley’s *Programming Pearls*, second edition. The idea is to give words that are anagrams a common signature, sort all the words together by their signature, and then print them. Dr. Bentley observes that taking the letters in each word and sorting them produces that common signature.

The following program uses arrays of arrays to bring together words with the same signature and array sorting to print the words in sorted order.

```
# anagram.awk --- An implementation of the anagram finding algorithm
#                 from Jon Bentley's "Programming Pearls", 2nd edition.
#                 Addison Wesley, 2000, ISBN 0-201-65788-0.
#                 Column 2, Problem C, section 2.8, pp 18-20.

/'s$/ { next }      # Skip possessives
```

The program starts with a header, and then a rule to skip possessives in the dictionary file. The next rule builds up the data structure. The first dimension of the array is indexed by the signature; the second dimension is the word itself:

```
{
    key = word2key($1) # Build signature
    data[key][$1] = $1 # Store word with signature
}
```

The `word2key()` function creates the signature. It splits the word apart into individual letters, sorts the letters, and then joins them back together:

```
# word2key --- split word apart into letters, sort, joining back together

function word2key(word, a, i, n, result)
{
    n = split(word, a, "")
    asort(a)

    for (i = 1; i <= n; i++)
        result = result a[i]

    return result
}
```

Finally, the `END` rule traverses the array and prints out the anagram lists. It sends the output to the system `sort` command, since otherwise the anagrams would appear in arbitrary order:

```

END {
    sort = "sort"
    for (key in data) {
        # Sort words with same key
        nwords = asorti(data[key], words)
        if (nwords == 1)
            continue

        # And print. Minor glitch: trailing space at end of each line
        for (j = 1; j <= nwords; j++)
            printf("%s ", words[j]) | sort
        print "" | sort
    }
    close(sort)
}

```

Here is some partial output when the program is run:

```

$ gawk -f anagram.awk /usr/share/dict/words | grep '^b'
...
babbled blabbed
babblers blabbers brabbles
babbling blabbing
babbly blabby
babel bable
babels beslab
babery yabber
...

```

### 13.3.11 And Now For Something Completely Different

The following program was written by Davide Brini and is published on [his website](#). It serves as his signature in the Usenet group `comp.lang.awk`. He supplies the following copyright terms:

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Here is the program:

```

awk 'BEGIN{O="~"~"~";o="=="=="=="";o+=+o;x=0""0;while(X++<=x+o+o)c=c"%c";
printf c,(x-0)*(x-0),x*(x-o)-o,x*(x-0)+x-0-o,+x*(x-0)-x+o,X*(o*o+0)+x-0,
X*(X-x)-o*o,(x+X)*o*o+o,x*(X-x)-0-0,x-0+(0+o+X+x)*(o+0),X*X-X*(x-0)-x+0,
0+X*(o*(o+0)+0),+x+0+X*o,x*(x-o),(o+X+x)*o*o-(x-0-0),0+(X-x)*(X+0),x-0}'

```

We leave it to you to determine what the program does.

## 14 dgawk: The awk Debugger

It would be nice if computer programs worked perfectly the first time they were run, but in real life, this rarely happens for programs of any complexity. Thus, most programming languages have facilities available for “debugging” programs, and now `awk` is no exception.

The `dgawk` debugger is purposely modeled after [the GNU Debugger \(GDB\)](#) command-line debugger. If you are familiar with GDB, learning `dgawk` is easy.

### 14.1 Introduction to dgawk

This section introduces debugging in general and begins the discussion of debugging in `gawk`.

#### 14.1.1 Debugging In General

(If you have used debuggers in other languages, you may want to skip ahead to the next section on the specific features of the `awk` debugger.)

Of course, a debugging program cannot remove bugs for you, since it has no way of knowing what you or your users consider a “bug” and what is a “feature.” (Sometimes, we humans have a hard time with this ourselves.) In that case, what can you expect from such a tool? The answer to that depends on the language being debugged, but in general, you can expect at least the following:

- The ability to watch a program execute its instructions one by one, giving you, the programmer, the opportunity to think about what is happening on a time scale of seconds, minutes, or hours, rather than the nanosecond time scale at which the code usually runs.
- The opportunity to not only passively observe the operation of your program, but to control it and try different paths of execution, without having to change your source files.
- The chance to see the values of data in the program at any point in execution, and also to change that data on the fly, to see how that affects what happens afterwards. (This often includes the ability to look at internal data structures besides the variables you actually defined in your code.)
- The ability to obtain additional information about your program’s state or even its internal structure.

All of these tools provide a great amount of help in using your own skills and understanding of the goals of your program to find where it is going wrong (or, for that matter, to better comprehend a perfectly functional program that you or someone else wrote).

#### 14.1.2 Additional Debugging Concepts

Before diving in to the details, we need to introduce several important concepts that apply to just about all debuggers, including `dgawk`. The following list defines terms used throughout the rest of this chapter.

##### *Stack Frame*

Programs generally call functions during the course of their execution. One function can call another, or a function can call itself (recursion). You can

view the chain of called functions (main program calls A, which calls B, which calls C), as a stack of executing functions: the currently running function is the topmost one on the stack, and when it finishes (returns), the next one down then becomes the active function. Such a stack is termed a *call stack*.

For each function on the call stack, the system maintains a data area that contains the function's parameters, local variables, and return value, as well as any other "bookkeeping" information needed to manage the call stack. This data area is termed a *stack frame*.

**gawk** also follows this model, and **dgawk** gives you access to the call stack and to each stack frame. You can see the call stack, as well as from where each function on the stack was invoked. Commands that print the call stack print information about each stack frame (as detailed later on).

### *Breakpoint*

During debugging, you often wish to let the program run until it reaches a certain point, and then continue execution from there one statement (or instruction) at a time. The way to do this is to set a *breakpoint* within the program. A breakpoint is where the execution of the program should break off (stop), so that you can take over control of the program's execution. You can add and remove as many breakpoints as you like.

### *Watchpoint*

A watchpoint is similar to a breakpoint. The difference is that breakpoints are oriented around the code: stop when a certain point in the code is reached. A watchpoint, however, specifies that program execution should stop when a *data value* is changed. This is useful, since sometimes it happens that a variable receives an erroneous value, and it's hard to track down where this happens just by looking at the code. By using a watchpoint, you can stop whenever a variable is assigned to, and usually find the errant code quite quickly.

## 14.1.3 Awk Debugging

Debugging an **awk** program has some specific aspects that are not shared with other programming languages.

First of all, the fact that **awk** programs usually take input line-by-line from a file or files and operate on those lines using specific rules makes it especially useful to organize viewing the execution of the program in terms of these rules. As we will see, each **awk** rule is treated almost like a function call, with its own specific block of instructions.

In addition, since **awk** is by design a very concise language, it is easy to lose sight of everything that is going on "inside" each line of **awk** code. The debugger provides the opportunity to look at the individual primitive instructions carried out by the higher-level **awk** commands.

## 14.2 Sample dgawk session

In order to illustrate the use of **dgawk**, let's look at a sample debugging session. We will use the **awk** implementation of the POSIX **uniq** command described earlier (see [Section 13.2.6 \[Printing Nonduplicated Lines of Text\]](#), page 255) as our example.

### 14.2.1 dgawk Invocation

Starting `dgawk` is exactly like running `awk`. The file(s) containing the program and any supporting code are given on the command line as arguments to one or more `-f` options. (`dgawk` is not designed to debug command-line programs, only programs contained in files.) In our case, we call `dgawk` like this:

```
$ dgawk -f getopt.awk -f join.awk -f uniq.awk inputfile
```

where both `'getopt.awk'` and `'uniq.awk'` are in `$AWKPATH`. (Experienced users of GDB or similar debuggers should note that this syntax is slightly different from what they are used to. With `dgawk`, the arguments for running the program are given in the command line to the debugger rather than as part of the `run` command at the debugger prompt.)

Instead of immediately running the program on `'inputfile'`, as `gawk` would ordinarily do, `dgawk` merely loads all the program source files, compiles them internally, and then gives us a prompt:

```
dgawk>
```

from which we can issue commands to the debugger. At this point, no code has been executed.

### 14.2.2 Finding The Bug

Let's say that we are having a problem using (a faulty version of) `'uniq.awk'` in the "field-skipping" mode, and it doesn't seem to be catching lines which should be identical when skipping the first field, such as:

```
awk is a wonderful program!
gawk is a wonderful program!
```

This could happen if we were thinking (C-like) of the fields in a record as being numbered in a zero-based fashion, so instead of the lines:

```
clast = join(alast, fcount+1, n)
cline = join(aline, fcount+1, m)
```

we wrote:

```
clast = join(alast, fcount, n)
cline = join(aline, fcount, m)
```

The first thing we usually want to do when trying to investigate a problem like this is to put a breakpoint in the program so that we can watch it at work and catch what it is doing wrong. A reasonable spot for a breakpoint in `'uniq.awk'` is at the beginning of the function `are_equal()`, which compares the current line with the previous one. To set the breakpoint, use the `b` (breakpoint) command:

```
dgawk> b are_equal
+ Breakpoint 1 set at file 'awklib/eg/prog/uniq.awk', line 64
```

The debugger tells us the file and line number where the breakpoint is. Now type `'r'` or `'run'` and the program runs until it hits the breakpoint for the first time:

```
dgawk> r
+ Starting program:
+ Stopping in Rule ...
+ Breakpoint 1, are_equal(n, m, clast, cline, alast, aline)
```

```

                at 'awklib/eg/prog/uniq.awk':64
-| 64          if (fcount == 0 && charcount == 0)
dgawk>

```

Now we can look at what's going on inside our program. First of all, let's see how we got to where we are. At the prompt, we type 'bt' (short for "backtrace"), and dgawk responds with a listing of the current stack frames:

```

dgawk> bt
-| #0  are_equal(n, m, clast, cline, alast, aline)
        at 'awklib/eg/prog/uniq.awk':69
-| #1  in main() at 'awklib/eg/prog/uniq.awk':89

```

This tells us that `are_equal()` was called by the main program at line 89 of 'uniq.awk'. (This is not a big surprise, since this is the only call to `are_equal()` in the program, but in more complex programs, knowing who called a function and with what parameters can be the key to finding the source of the problem.)

Now that we're in `are_equal()`, we can start looking at the values of some variables. Let's say we type 'p n' (p is short for "print"). We would expect to see the value of n, a parameter to `are_equal()`. Actually, dgawk gives us:

```

dgawk> p n
-| n = untyped variable

```

In this case, n is an uninitialized local variable, since the function was called without arguments (see [Section 6.4 \[Function Calls\], page 107](#)).

A more useful variable to display might be the current record:

```

dgawk> p $0
-| $0 = string ("gawk is a wonderful program!")

```

This might be a bit puzzling at first since this is the second line of our test input above. Let's look at NR:

```

dgawk> p NR
-| NR = number (2)

```

So we can see that `are_equal()` was only called for the second record of the file. Of course, this is because our program contained a rule for 'NR == 1':

```

NR == 1 {
    last = $0
    next
}

```

OK, let's just check that that rule worked correctly:

```

dgawk> p last
-| last = string ("awk is a wonderful program!")

```

Everything we have done so far has verified that the program has worked as planned, up to and including the call to `are_equal()`, so the problem must be inside this function. To investigate further, we must begin "stepping through" the lines of `are_equal()`. We start by typing 'n' (for "next"):

```

dgawk> n
-| 67          if (fcount > 0) {

```

This tells us that `gawk` is now ready to execute line 67, which decides whether to give the lines the special “field skipping” treatment indicated by the `-f` command-line option. (Notice that we skipped from where we were before at line 64 to here, since the condition in line 64

```
    if (fcount == 0 && charcount == 0)
was false.)
```

Continuing to step, we now get to the splitting of the current and last records:

```
dgawk> n
+ 68          n = split(last, alast)
dgawk> n
+ 69          m = split($0, aline)
```

At this point, we should be curious to see what our records were split into, so we try to look:

```
dgawk> p n m alast aline
+ n = number (5)
+ m = number (5)
+ alast = array, 5 elements
+ aline = array, 5 elements
```

(The `p` command can take more than one argument, similar to `awk`’s `print` statement.)

This is kind of disappointing, though. All we found out is that there are five elements in each of our arrays. Useful enough (we now know that none of the words were accidentally left out), but what if we want to see inside the array?

The first choice would be to use subscripts:

```
dgawk> p alast[0]
+ "0" not in array 'alast'
```

Oops!

```
dgawk> p alast[1]
+ alast["1"] = string ("awk")
```

This would be kind of slow for a 100-member array, though, so `dgawk` provides a shortcut (reminiscent of another language not to be mentioned):

```
dgawk> p @alast
+ alast["1"] = string ("awk")
+ alast["2"] = string ("is")
+ alast["3"] = string ("a")
+ alast["4"] = string ("wonderful")
+ alast["5"] = string ("program!")
```

It looks like we got this far OK. Let’s take another step or two:

```
dgawk> n
+ 70          clast = join(alast, fcount, n)
dgawk> n
+ 71          cline = join(aline, fcount, m)
```

Well, here we are at our error (sorry to spoil the suspense). What we had in mind was to join the fields starting from the second one to make the virtual record to compare, and if the first field was numbered zero, this would work. Let’s look at what we’ve got:

```
dgawk> p cline clast
└─ cline = string ("gawk is a wonderful program!")
└─ clast = string ("awk is a wonderful program!")
```

Hey, those look pretty familiar! They're just our original, unaltered, input records. A little thinking (the human brain is still the best debugging tool), and we realize that we were off by one!

We get out of dgawk:

```
dgawk> q
└─ The program is running. Exit anyway (y/n)? y
```

Then we get into an editor:

```
clast = join(alast, fcount+1, n)
cline = join(aline, fcount+1, m)
```

and problem solved!

## 14.3 Main dgawk Commands

The dgawk command set can be divided into the following categories:

- Breakpoint control
- Execution control
- Viewing and changing data
- Working with the stack
- Getting information
- Miscellaneous

Each of these are discussed in the following subsections. In the following descriptions, commands which may be abbreviated show the abbreviation on a second description line. A dgawk command name may also be truncated if that partial name is unambiguous. dgawk has the built-in capability to automatically repeat the previous command when just hitting **Enter**. This works for the commands `list`, `next`, `nexti`, `step`, `stepi` and `continue` executed without any argument.

### 14.3.1 Control Of Breakpoints

As we saw above, the first thing you probably want to do in a debugging session is to get your breakpoints set up, since otherwise your program will just run as if it was not under the debugger. The commands for controlling breakpoints are:

```
break [[filename:]n | function] ["expression"]
b [[filename:]n | function] ["expression"]
```

Without any argument, set a breakpoint at the next instruction to be executed in the selected stack frame. Arguments can be one of the following:

*n*            Set a breakpoint at line number *n* in the current source file.

*filename*:*n*    Set a breakpoint at line number *n* in source file *filename*.

*function*    Set a breakpoint at entry to (the first instruction of) function *function*.

Each breakpoint is assigned a number which can be used to delete it from the breakpoint list using the `delete` command.

With a breakpoint, you may also supply a condition. This is an `awk` expression (enclosed in double quotes) that `dgawk` evaluates whenever the breakpoint is reached. If the condition is true, then `dgawk` stops execution and prompts for a command. Otherwise, `dgawk` continues executing the program.

`clear` *[[filename:]n | function]*

Without any argument, delete any breakpoint at the next instruction to be executed in the selected stack frame. If the program stops at a breakpoint, this deletes that breakpoint so that the program does not stop at that location again. Arguments can be one of the following:

*n* Delete breakpoint(s) set at line number *n* in the current source file.

*filename:n* Delete breakpoint(s) set at line number *n* in source file *filename*.

*function* Delete breakpoint(s) set at entry to function *function*.

`condition` *n "expression"*

Add a condition to existing breakpoint or watchpoint *n*. The condition is an `awk` expression that `dgawk` evaluates whenever the breakpoint or watchpoint is reached. If the condition is true, then `dgawk` stops execution and prompts for a command. Otherwise, `dgawk` continues executing the program. If the condition expression is not specified, any existing condition is removed; i.e., the breakpoint or watchpoint is made unconditional.

`delete` *[n1 n2 ...] [n-m]*

`d` *[n1 n2 ...] [n-m]*

Delete specified breakpoints or a range of breakpoints. Deletes all defined breakpoints if no argument is supplied.

`disable` *[n1 n2 ... | n-m]*

Disable specified breakpoints or a range of breakpoints. Without any argument, disables all breakpoints.

`enable` *[del | once] [n1 n2 ...] [n-m]*

`e` *[del | once] [n1 n2 ...] [n-m]*

Enable specified breakpoints or a range of breakpoints. Without any argument, enables all breakpoints. Optionally, you can specify how to enable the breakpoint:

`del` Enable the breakpoint(s) temporarily, then delete it when the program stops at the breakpoint.

`once` Enable the breakpoint(s) temporarily, then disable it when the program stops at the breakpoint.

`ignore` *n count*

Ignore breakpoint number *n* the next *count* times it is hit.

**tbreak** *[[filename:]n | function]*

**t** *[[filename:]n | function]*

Set a temporary breakpoint (enabled for only one stop). The arguments are the same as for **break**.

### 14.3.2 Control of Execution

Now that your breakpoints are ready, you can start running the program and observing its behavior. There are more commands for controlling execution of the program than we saw in our earlier example:

**commands** *[n]*

**silent**

...

**end** Set a list of commands to be executed upon stopping at a breakpoint or watchpoint. *n* is the breakpoint or watchpoint number. Without a number, the last one set is used. The actual commands follow, starting on the next line, and terminated by the **end** command. If the command **silent** is in the list, the usual messages about stopping at a breakpoint and the source line are not printed. Any command in the list that resumes execution (e.g., **continue**) terminates the list (an implicit **end**), and subsequent commands are ignored. For example:

```
dgawk> commands
> silent
> printf "A silent breakpoint; i = %d\n", i
> info locals
> set i = 10
> continue
> end
dgawk>
```

**continue** *[count]*

**c** *[count]* Resume program execution. If continued from a breakpoint and *count* is specified, ignores the breakpoint at that location the next *count* times before stopping.

**finish** Execute until the selected stack frame returns. Print the returned value.

**next** *[count]*

**n** *[count]* Continue execution to the next source line, stepping over function calls. The argument *count* controls how many times to repeat the action, as in **step**.

**nexti** *[count]*

**ni** *[count]* Execute one (or *count*) instruction(s), stepping over function calls.

**return** *[value]*

Cancel execution of a function call. If *value* (either a string or a number) is specified, it is used as the function's return value. If used in a frame other than the innermost one (the currently executing function, i.e., frame number 0), discard all inner frames in addition to the selected one, and the caller of that frame becomes the innermost frame.

**run**  
**r** Start/restart execution of the program. When restarting, **dgawk** retains the current breakpoints, watchpoints, command history, automatic display variables, and debugger options.

**step** [*count*]  
**s** [*count*] Continue execution until control reaches a different source line in the current stack frame. **step** steps inside any function called within the line. If the argument *count* is supplied, steps that many times before stopping, unless it encounters a breakpoint or watchpoint.

**stepi** [*count*]  
**si** [*count*] Execute one (or *count*) instruction(s), stepping inside function calls. (For illustration of what is meant by an “instruction” in **gawk**, see the output shown under **dump** in [Section 14.3.6 \[Miscellaneous Commands\]](#), page 296.)

**until** [[*filename:*]*n* | *function*]  
**u** [[*filename:*]*n* | *function*] Without any argument, continue execution until a line past the current line in current stack frame is reached. With an argument, continue execution until the specified location is reached, or the current stack frame returns.

### 14.3.3 Viewing and Changing Data

The commands for viewing and changing variables inside of **gawk** are:

**display** [*var* | *\$n*]  
 Add variable *var* (or field *\$n*) to the display list. The value of the variable or field is displayed each time the program stops. Each variable added to the list is identified by a unique number:

```
dgawk> display x
+ 10: x = 1
```

displays the assigned item number, the variable name and its current value. If the display variable refers to a function parameter, it is silently deleted from the list as soon as the execution reaches a context where no such variable of the given name exists. Without argument, **display** displays the current values of items on the list.

**eval** "*awk statements*"  
 Evaluate *awk statements* in the context of the running program. You can do anything that an **awk** program would do: assign values to variables, call functions, and so on.

**eval** *param*, . . .  
*awk statements*  
**end** This form of **eval** is similar, but it allows you to define “local variables” that exist in the context of the *awk statements*, instead of using variables or function parameters defined by the program.

```
print var1[, var2 ...]
```

```
p var1[, var2 ...]
```

Print the value of a **gawk** variable or field. Fields must be referenced by constants:

```
dgawk> print $3
```

This prints the third field in the input record (if the specified field does not exist, it prints ‘Null field’). A variable can be an array element, with the subscripts being constant values. To print the contents of an array, prefix the name of the array with the ‘@’ symbol:

```
gawk> print @a
```

This prints the indices and the corresponding values for all elements in the array **a**.

```
printf format [, arg ...]
```

Print formatted text. The *format* may include escape sequences, such as ‘\n’ (see [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\], page 38](#)). No newline is printed unless one is specified.

```
set var=value
```

Assign a constant (number or string) value to an **awk** variable or field. String values must be enclosed between double quotes (“...”).

You can also set special **awk** variables, such as **FS**, **NF**, **NR**, etc.

```
watch var | $n ["expression"]
```

```
w var | $n ["expression"]
```

Add variable *var* (or field **\$n**) to the watch list. **dgawk** then stops whenever the value of the variable or field changes. Each watched item is assigned a number which can be used to delete it from the watch list using the **unwatch** command.

With a watchpoint, you may also supply a condition. This is an **awk** expression (enclosed in double quotes) that **dgawk** evaluates whenever the watchpoint is reached. If the condition is true, then **dgawk** stops execution and prompts for a command. Otherwise, **dgawk** continues executing the program.

```
undisplay [n]
```

Remove item number *n* (or all items, if no argument) from the automatic display list.

```
unwatch [n]
```

Remove item number *n* (or all items, if no argument) from the watch list.

### 14.3.4 Dealing With The Stack

Whenever you run a program which contains any function calls, **gawk** maintains a stack of all of the function calls leading up to where the program is right now. You can see how you got to where you are, and also move around in the stack to see what the state of things was in the functions which called the one you are in. The commands for doing this are:

```
backtrace [count]
```

```
bt [count]
```

Print a backtrace of all function calls (stack frames), or innermost *count* frames if *count* > 0. Print the outermost *count* frames if *count* < 0. The backtrace

displays the name and arguments to each function, the source file name, and the line number.

**down** [*count*]

Move *count* (default 1) frames down the stack toward the innermost frame. Then select and print the frame.

**frame** [*n*]

**f** [*n*]

Select and print (frame number, function and argument names, source file, and the source line) stack frame *n*. Frame 0 is the currently executing, or *innermost*, frame (function call), frame 1 is the frame that called the innermost one. The highest numbered frame is the one for the main program.

**up** [*count*] Move *count* (default 1) frames up the stack toward the outermost frame. Then select and print the frame.

### 14.3.5 Obtaining Information About The Program and The Debugger State

Besides looking at the values of variables, there is often a need to get other sorts of information about the state of your program and of the debugging environment itself. **dgawk** has one command which provides this information, appropriately called **info**. **info** is used with one of a number of arguments that tell it exactly what you want to know:

**info** *what*

**i** *what* The value for *what* should be one of the following:

**args** Arguments of the selected frame.

**break** List all currently set breakpoints.

**display** List all items in the automatic display list.

**frame** Description of the selected stack frame.

**functions**

List all function definitions including source file names and line numbers.

**locals** Local variables of the selected frame.

**source** The name of the current source file. Each time the program stops, the current source file is the file containing the current instruction. When **dgawk** first starts, the current source file is the first file included via the **-f** option. The **list filename:lineno** command can be used at any time to change the current source.

**sources** List all program sources.

**variables**

List all global variables.

**watch** List all items in the watch list.

Additional commands give you control over the debugger, the ability to save the debugger's state, and the ability to run debugger commands from a file. The commands are:

**option** [*name*[=*value*]]

o [*name*[=*value*]]

Without an argument, display the available debugger options and their current values. ‘**option name**’ shows the current value of the named option. ‘**option name=value**’ assigns a new value to the named option. The available options are:

**history\_size**

The maximum number of lines to keep in the history file ‘`./dgawk_history`’. The default is 100.

**listsize** The number of lines that **list** prints. The default is 15.

**outfile** Send **gawk** output to a file; debugger output still goes to standard output. An empty string (“”) resets output to standard output.

**prompt** The debugger prompt. The default is ‘`dgawk>`’.

**save\_history** [*on* | *off*]

Save command history to file ‘`./dgawk_history`’. The default is *on*.

**save\_options** [*on* | *off*]

Save current options to file ‘`./dgawkrc`’ upon exit. The default is *on*. Options are read back in to the next session upon startup.

**trace** [*on* | *off*]

Turn instruction tracing on or off. The default is *off*.

**save filename**

Save the commands from the current session to the given file name, so that they can be replayed using the **source** command.

**source filename**

Run command(s) from a file; an error in any command does not terminate execution of subsequent commands. Comments (lines starting with ‘#’) are allowed in a command file. Empty lines are ignored; they do *not* repeat the last command. You can’t restart the program by having more than one **run** command in the file. Also, the list of commands may include additional **source** commands; however, **dgawk** will not source the same file more than once in order to avoid infinite recursion.

In addition to, or instead of the **source** command, you can use the ‘`-R file`’ or ‘`--command=file`’ command-line options to execute commands from a file non-interactively (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

### 14.3.6 Miscellaneous Commands

There are a few more commands which do not fit into the previous categories, as follows:

**dump** [*filename*]

Dump bytecode of the program to standard output or to the file named in *filename*. This prints a representation of the internal instructions which **gawk** executes to implement the **awk** commands in a program. This can be very

enlightening, as the following partial dump of Davide Brini's obfuscated code (see [Section 13.3.11 \[And Now For Something Completely Different\]](#), page 284) demonstrates:

```

dgawk> dump
+      # BEGIN
+
+ [ 2:0x89faef4] Op_rule      : [in_rule = BEGIN] [source_file = brini.awk]
+ [ 3:0x89fa428] Op_push_i    : "\"" [PERM|STRING|STRCUR]
+ [ 3:0x89fa464] Op_push_i    : "\"" [PERM|STRING|STRCUR]
+ [ 3:0x89fa450] Op_match     :
+ [ 3:0x89fa3ec] Op_store_var : 0 [do_reference = FALSE]
+ [ 4:0x89fa48c] Op_push_i    : "==" [PERM|STRING|STRCUR]
+ [ 4:0x89fa4c8] Op_push_i    : "==" [PERM|STRING|STRCUR]
+ [ 4:0x89fa4b4] Op_equal     :
+ [ 4:0x89fa400] Op_store_var : o [do_reference = FALSE]
+ [ 5:0x89fa4f0] Op_push     : o
+ [ 5:0x89fa4dc] Op_plus_i   : 0 [PERM|NUMCUR|NUMBER]
+ [ 5:0x89fa414] Op_push_lhs : o [do_reference = TRUE]
+ [ 5:0x89fa4a0] Op_assign_plus :
+ [ :0x89fa478] Op_pop       :
+ [ 6:0x89fa540] Op_push     : 0
+ [ 6:0x89fa554] Op_push_i    : "" [PERM|STRING|STRCUR]
+ [ :0x89fa5a4] Op_no_op     :
+ [ 6:0x89fa590] Op_push     : 0
+ [ :0x89fa5b8] Op_concat    : [expr_count = 3] [concat_flag = 0]
+ [ 6:0x89fa518] Op_store_var : x [do_reference = FALSE]
+ [ 7:0x89fa504] Op_push_loop : [target_continue = 0x89fa568] [tar-
get_break = 0x89fa680]
+ [ 7:0x89fa568] Op_push_lhs  : X [do_reference = TRUE]
+ [ 7:0x89fa52c] Op_postincrement :
+ [ 7:0x89fa5e0] Op_push     : x
+ [ 7:0x89fa61c] Op_push     : o
+ [ 7:0x89fa5f4] Op_plus     :
+ [ 7:0x89fa644] Op_push     : o
+ [ 7:0x89fa630] Op_plus     :
+ [ 7:0x89fa5cc] Op_leq      :
+ [ :0x89fa57c] Op_jump_false : [target_jump = 0x89fa680]
+ [ 7:0x89fa694] Op_push_i    : "%c" [PERM|STRING|STRCUR]
+ [ :0x89fa6d0] Op_no_op     :
+ [ 7:0x89fa608] Op_assign_concat : c
+ [ :0x89fa6a8] Op_jump     : [target_jump = 0x89fa568]
+ [ :0x89fa680] Op_pop_loop  :
+
+ ...
+
+ [ 8:0x89fa658] Op_K_printf  : [expr_count = 17] [redir_type = ""]
+ [ :0x89fa374] Op_no_op     :
+ [ :0x89fa3d8] Op_atexit    :
+ [ :0x89fa6bc] Op_stop     :
+ [ :0x89fa39c] Op_no_op     :
+ [ :0x89fa3b0] Op_after_beginfile :
+ [ :0x89fa388] Op_no_op     :
+ [ :0x89fa3c4] Op_after_endfile :
dgawk>

```

**help**

**h** Print a list of all of the **dgawk** commands with a short summary of their usage. ‘**help command**’ prints the information about the command *command*.

**list** [- | + | *n* | *filename:n* | *n-m* | *function*]

**l** [- | + | *n* | *filename:n* | *n-m* | *function*]

Print the specified lines (default 15) from the current source file or the file named *filename*. The possible arguments to **list** are as follows:

- Print lines before the lines last printed.

+ Print lines after the lines last printed. **list** without any argument does the same thing.

*n* Print lines centered around line number *n*.

*n-m* Print lines from *n* to *m*.

*filename:n*

Print lines centered around line number *n* in source file *filename*. This command may change the current source file.

*function* Print lines centered around beginning of the function *function*. This command may change the current source file.

**quit**

**q** Exit the debugger. Debugging is great fun, but sometimes we all have to tend to other obligations in life, and sometimes we find the bug, and are free to go on to the next one! As we saw above, if you are running a program, **dgawk** warns you if you accidentally type ‘**q**’ or ‘**quit**’, to make sure you really want to quit.

**trace on** | **off**

Turn on or off a continuous printing of instructions which are about to be executed, along with printing the **awk** line which they implement. The default is **off**.

It is to be hoped that most of the “opcodes” in these instructions are fairly self-explanatory, and using **stepi** and **nexti** while **trace** is on will make them into familiar friends.

## 14.4 Readline Support

If **dgawk** is compiled with the **readline** library, you can take advantage of that library’s command completion and history expansion features. The following types of completion are available:

Command completion

Command names.

Source file name completion

Source file names. Relevant commands are **break**, **clear**, **list**, **tbreak**, and **until**.

## Argument completion

Non-numeric arguments to a command. Relevant commands are `enable` and `info`.

## Variable name completion

Global variable names, and function arguments in the current context if the program is running. Relevant commands are `display`, `print`, `set`, and `watch`.

## 14.5 Limitations and Future Plans

We hope you find `dgawk` useful and enjoyable to work with, but as with any program, especially in its early releases, it still has some limitations. A few which are worth being aware of are:

- At this point, `dgawk` does not give a detailed explanation of what you did wrong when you type in something it doesn't like. Rather, it just responds 'syntax error'. When you do figure out what your mistake was, though, you'll feel like a real guru.
- If you perused the dump of opcodes in [Section 14.3.6 \[Miscellaneous Commands\], page 296](#), (or if you are already familiar with `gawk` internals), you will realize that much of the internal manipulation of data in `gawk`, as in many interpreters, is done on a stack. `Op_push`, `Op_pop`, etc., are the “bread and butter” of most `gawk` code. Unfortunately, as of now, `dgawk` does not allow you to examine the stack's contents. That is, the intermediate results of expression evaluation are on the stack, but cannot be printed. Rather, only variables which are defined in the program can be printed. Of course, a workaround for this is to use more explicit variables at the debugging stage and then change back to obscure, perhaps more optimal code later.
- There is no way to look “inside” the process of compiling regular expressions to see if you got it right. As an `awk` programmer, you are expected to know what `/[^\[:alnum:\]:blank:]]/` means.
- `dgawk` is designed to be used by running a program (with all its parameters) on the command line, as described in [Section 14.2.1 \[dgawk Invocation\], page 287](#). There is no way (as of now) to attach or “break in” to a running program. This seems reasonable for a language which is used mainly for quickly executing, short programs.
- `dgawk` only accepts source supplied with the `-f` option.

Look forward to a future release when these and other missing features may be added, and of course feel free to try to add them yourself!



## Appendix A The Evolution of the `awk` Language

This book describes the GNU implementation of `awk`, which follows the POSIX specification. Many long-time `awk` users learned `awk` programming with the original `awk` implementation in Version 7 Unix. (This implementation was the basis for `awk` in Berkeley Unix, through 4.3-Reno. Subsequent versions of Berkeley Unix, and some systems derived from 4.4BSD-Lite, use various versions of `gawk` for their `awk`.) This chapter briefly describes the evolution of the `awk` language, with cross-references to other parts of the book where you can find more information.

### A.1 Major Changes Between V7 and SVR3.1

The `awk` language evolved considerably between the release of Version 7 Unix (1978) and the new version that was first made generally available in System V Release 3.1 (1987). This section summarizes the changes, with cross-references to further details:

- The requirement for ‘;’ to separate rules on a line (see [Section 1.6 \[awk Statements Versus Lines\]](#), page 21).
- User-defined functions and the `return` statement (see [Section 9.2 \[User-Defined Functions\]](#), page 170).
- The `delete` statement (see [Section 8.2 \[The delete Statement\]](#), page 139).
- The `do-while` statement (see [Section 7.4.3 \[The do-while Statement\]](#), page 120).
- The built-in functions `atan2()`, `cos()`, `sin()`, `rand()`, and `srand()` (see [Section 9.1.2 \[Numeric Functions\]](#), page 147).
- The built-in functions `gsub()`, `sub()`, and `match()` (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149).
- The built-in functions `close()` and `system()` (see [Section 9.1.4 \[Input/Output Functions\]](#), page 160).
- The `ARGC`, `ARGV`, `FNR`, `RLENGTH`, `RSTART`, and `SUBSEP` built-in variables (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126).
- Assignable `$0` (see [Section 4.4 \[Changing the Contents of a Field\]](#), page 54).
- The conditional expression using the ternary operator ‘?:’ (see [Section 6.3.4 \[Conditional Expressions\]](#), page 107).
- The expression ‘`index-variable in array`’ outside of `for` statements (see [Section 8.1.2 \[Referring to an Array Element\]](#), page 136).
- The exponentiation operator ‘^’ (see [Section 6.2.1 \[Arithmetic Operators\]](#), page 95) and its assignment operator form ‘^=’ (see [Section 6.2.3 \[Assignment Expressions\]](#), page 98).
- C-compatible operator precedence, which breaks some old `awk` programs (see [Section 6.5 \[Operator Precedence \(How Operators Nest\)\]](#), page 109).
- Regexp as the value of `FS` (see [Section 4.5 \[Specifying How Fields Are Separated\]](#), page 56) and as the third argument to the `split()` function (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149), rather than using only the first character of `FS`.
- Dynamic regexps as operands of the ‘~’ and ‘!~’ operators (see [Section 3.1 \[How to Use Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37).

- The escape sequences ‘\b’, ‘\f’, and ‘\r’ (see [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), page 38). (Some vendors have updated their old versions of `awk` to recognize ‘\b’, ‘\f’, and ‘\r’, but this is not something you can rely on.)
- Redirection of input for the `getline` function (see [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with getline\]](#), page 67).
- Multiple `BEGIN` and `END` rules (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114).
- Multidimensional arrays (see [Section 8.5 \[Multidimensional Arrays\]](#), page 142).

## A.2 Changes Between SVR3.1 and SVR4

The System V Release 4 (1989) version of Unix `awk` added these features (some of which originated in `gawk`):

- The `ENVIRON` array (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126).
- Multiple ‘-f’ options on the command line (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).
- The ‘-v’ option for assigning variables before program execution begins (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).
- The ‘--’ option for terminating command-line options.
- The ‘\a’, ‘\v’, and ‘\x’ escape sequences (see [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), page 38).
- A defined return value for the `srand()` built-in function (see [Section 9.1.2 \[Numeric Functions\]](#), page 147).
- The `toupper()` and `tolower()` built-in string functions for case translation (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149).
- A cleaner specification for the ‘%c’ format-control letter in the `printf` function (see [Section 5.5.2 \[Format-Control Letters\]](#), page 76).
- The ability to dynamically pass the field width and precision (“%\*. \*d”) in the argument list of the `printf` function (see [Section 5.5.2 \[Format-Control Letters\]](#), page 76).
- The use of regexp constants, such as `/foo/`, as expressions, where they are equivalent to using the matching operator, as in ‘\$0 ~ /foo/’ (see [Section 6.1.2 \[Using Regular Expression Constants\]](#), page 91).
- Processing of escape sequences inside command-line variable assignments (see [Section 6.1.3.2 \[Assigning Variables on the Command Line\]](#), page 92).

## A.3 Changes Between SVR4 and POSIX `awk`

The POSIX Command Language and Utilities standard for `awk` (1992) introduced the following changes into the language:

- The use of ‘-W’ for implementation-specific options (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).
- The use of `CONVFMT` for controlling the conversion of numbers to strings (see [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\]](#), page 93).
- The concept of a numeric string and tighter comparison rules to go with it (see [Section 6.3.2 \[Variable Typing and Comparison Expressions\]](#), page 102).

- The use of built-in variables as function parameter names is forbidden (see Section 9.2.1 [Function Definition Syntax], page 170).
- More complete documentation of many of the previously undocumented features of the language.

See Section A.6 [Common Extensions Summary], page 305, for a list of common extensions not permitted by the POSIX standard.

The 2008 POSIX standard can be found online at <http://www.opengroup.org/onlinepubs/9699919799/>.

## A.4 Extensions in Brian Kernighan's awk

Brian Kernighan has made his version available via his home page (see Section B.5 [Other Freely Available awk Implementations], page 321).

This section describes common extensions that originally appeared in his version of `awk`.

- The `**` and `**=` operators (see Section 6.2.1 [Arithmetic Operators], page 95 and Section 6.2.3 [Assignment Expressions], page 98).
- The use of `func` as an abbreviation for `function` (see Section 9.2.1 [Function Definition Syntax], page 170).
- The `fflush()` built-in function for flushing buffered output (see Section 9.1.4 [Input/Output Functions], page 160).

See Section A.6 [Common Extensions Summary], page 305, for a full list of the extensions available in his `awk`.

## A.5 Extensions in gawk Not in POSIX awk

The GNU implementation, `gawk`, adds a large number of features. They can all be disabled with either the `--traditional` or `--posix` options (see Section 2.2 [Command-Line Options], page 25).

A number of features have come and gone over the years. This section summarizes the additional features over POSIX `awk` that are in the current version of `gawk`.

- Additional built-in variables:
  - The `ARGIND`, `BINMODE`, `ERRNO`, `FIELDWIDTHS`, `FPAT`, `IGNORECASE`, `LINT`, `PROCINFO`, `RT`, and `TEXTDOMAIN` variables (see Section 7.5 [Built-in Variables], page 126).
- Special files in I/O redirections:
  - The `/dev/stdin`, `/dev/stdout`, `/dev/stderr` and `/dev/fd/N` special file names (see Section 5.7 [Special File Names in gawk], page 84).
  - The `/inet`, `/inet4`, and `/inet6` special files for TCP/IP networking using `|&` to specify which version of the IP protocol to use. (see Section 11.4 [Using gawk for Network Programming], page 205).
- Changes and/or additions to the language:
  - The `\x` escape sequence (see Section 3.2 [Escape Sequences], page 38).
  - Full support for both POSIX and GNU regexps (see Chapter 3 [Regular Expressions], page 37).
  - The ability for `FS` and for the third argument to `split()` to be null strings (see Section 4.5.3 [Making Each Character a Separate Field], page 58).

- The ability for `RS` to be a regexp (see Section 4.1 [How Input Is Split into Records], page 49).
- The ability to use octal and hexadecimal constants in `awk` program source code (see Section 6.1.1.2 [Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers], page 89).
- The `'|&'` operator for two-way I/O to a coprocess (see Section 11.3 [Two-Way Communications with Another Process], page 203).
- Indirect function calls (see Section 9.3 [Indirect Function Calls], page 178).
- Directories on the command line produce a warning and are skipped (see Section 4.10 [Directories On The Command Line], page 72).
- New keywords:
  - The `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE` special patterns. (see Section 7.1.5 [The `BEGINFILE` and `ENDFILE` Special Patterns], page 115).
  - The ability to delete all of an array at once with `'delete array'` (see Section 8.2 [The `delete` Statement], page 139).
  - The `nextfile` statement (see Section 7.4.9 [Using `gawk`'s `nextfile` Statement], page 125).
  - The `switch` statement (see Section 7.4.5 [The `switch` Statement], page 121).
- Changes to standard `awk` functions:
  - The optional second argument to `close()` that allows closing one end of a two-way pipe to a coprocess (see Section 11.3 [Two-Way Communications with Another Process], page 203).
  - POSIX compliance for `gsub()` and `sub()`.
  - The `length()` function accepts an array argument and returns the number of elements in the array (see Section 9.1.3 [String-Manipulation Functions], page 149).
  - The optional third argument to the `match()` function for capturing text-matching subexpressions within a regexp (see Section 9.1.3 [String-Manipulation Functions], page 149).
  - Positional specifiers in `printf` formats for making translations easier (see Section 10.4.2 [Rearranging `printf` Arguments], page 189).
  - The `split()` function's additional optional fourth argument which is an array to hold the text of the field separators. (see Section 9.1.3 [String-Manipulation Functions], page 149).
- Additional functions only in `gawk`:
  - The `and()`, `compl()`, `lshift()`, `or()`, `rshift()`, and `xor()` functions for bit manipulation (see Section 9.1.6 [Bit-Manipulation Functions], page 167).
  - The `asort()` and `asorti()` functions for sorting arrays (see Section 11.2 [Controlling Array Traversal and Array Sorting], page 196).
  - The `bindtextdomain()`, `dcgettext()` and `dcngettext()` functions for internationalization (see Section 10.3 [Internationalizing `awk` Programs], page 187).
  - The `extension()` built-in function and the ability to add new functions dynamically (see Section C.3 [Adding New Built-in Functions to `gawk`], page 328).
  - The `fflush()` function from Brian Kernighan's version of `awk` (see Section 9.1.4 [Input/Output Functions], page 160).

- The `gensub()`, `patsplit()`, and `strtonum()` functions for more powerful text manipulation (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149).
- The `mktime()`, `systeme()`, and `strftime()` functions for working with time-stamps (see [Section 9.1.5 \[Time Functions\]](#), page 163).
- Changes and/or additions in the command-line options:
  - The `AWKPATH` environment variable for specifying a path search for the ‘-f’ command-line option (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).
  - The ability to use GNU-style long-named options that start with ‘--’ and the ‘--characters-as-bytes’, ‘--compat’, ‘--dump-variables’, ‘--exec’, ‘--gen-pot’, ‘--lint’, ‘--lint-old’, ‘--non-decimal-data’, ‘--posix’, ‘--profile’, ‘--re-interval’, ‘--sandbox’, ‘--source’, ‘--traditional’, and ‘--use-lc-numeric’ options (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).
- Support for the following obsolete systems was removed from the code and the documentation for `gawk` version 4.0:
  - Amiga
  - Atari
  - BeOS
  - Cray
  - MIPS RiscOS
  - MS-DOS with the Microsoft Compiler
  - MS-Windows with the Microsoft Compiler
  - NeXT
  - SunOS 3.x, Sun 386 (Road Runner)
  - Tandem (non-POSIX)
  - Prestandard VAX C compiler for VAX/VMS

## A.6 Common Extensions Summary

This section summarizes the common extensions supported by `gawk`, Brian Kernighan’s `awk`, and `mawk`, the three most widely-used freely available versions of `awk` (see [Section B.5 \[Other Freely Available awk Implementations\]](#), page 321).

Feature	BWK Awk	Mawk	GNU Awk
‘\x’ Escape sequence	X	X	X
RS as regexp		X	X
FS as null string	X	X	X
‘/dev/stdin’ special file	X		X
‘/dev/stdout’ special file	X	X	X
‘/dev/stderr’ special file	X	X	X
** and **= operators	X		X
func keyword	X		X
nextfile statement	X	X	X
delete without subscript	X	X	X
length() of an array	X		X

<code>fflush()</code> function	X	X	X
<code>BINMODE</code> variable		X	X

## A.7 Regexp Ranges and Locales: A Long Sad Story

This section describes the confusing history of ranges within regular expressions and their interactions with locales, and how this affected different versions of `gawk`.

The original Unix tools that worked with regular expressions defined character ranges (such as `[a-z]`) to match any character between the first character in the range and the last character in the range, inclusive. Ordering was based on the numeric value of each character in the machine's native character set. Thus, on ASCII-based systems, `[a-z]` matched all the lowercase letters, and only the lowercase letters, since the numeric values for the letters from 'a' through 'z' were contiguous. (On an EBCDIC system, the range `[a-z]` includes additional, non-alphabetic characters as well.)

Almost all introductory Unix literature explained range expressions as working in this fashion, and in particular, would teach that the "correct" way to match lowercase letters was with `[a-z]`, and that `[A-Z]` was the the "correct" way to match uppercase letters. And indeed, this was true.

The 1993 POSIX standard introduced the idea of locales (see [Section 6.6 \[Where You Are Makes A Difference\]](#), page 110). Since many locales include other letters besides the plain twenty-six letters of the American English alphabet, the POSIX standard added character classes (see [Section 3.4 \[Using Bracket Expressions\]](#), page 42) as a way to match different kinds of characters besides the traditional ones in the ASCII character set.

However, the standard *changed* the interpretation of range expressions. In the "C" and "POSIX" locales, a range expression like `[a-dx-z]` is still equivalent to `[abcdxyz]`, as in ASCII. But outside those locales, the ordering was defined to be based on *collation order*.

In many locales, 'A' and 'a' are both less than 'B'. In other words, these locales sort characters in dictionary order, and `[a-dx-z]` is typically not equivalent to `[abcdxyz]`; instead it might be equivalent to `[aBbCcDxYyz]`, for example.

This point needs to be emphasized: Much literature teaches that you should use `[a-z]` to match a lowercase character. But on systems with non-ASCII locales, this also matched all of the uppercase characters except 'Z'! This was a continuous cause of confusion, even well into the twenty-first century.

To demonstrate these issues, the following example uses the `sub()` function, which does text replacement (see [Section 9.1.3 \[String-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 149). Here, the intent is to remove trailing uppercase characters:

```
$ echo something1234abc | gawk-3.1.8 '{ sub("[A-Z]*$", ""); print }'
+ something1234a
```

This output is unexpected, since the 'bc' at the end of 'something1234abc' should not normally match `[A-Z]*`. This result is due to the locale setting (and thus you may not see it on your system).

Similar considerations apply to other ranges. For example, `["-/]` is perfectly valid in ASCII, but is not valid in many Unicode locales, such as `en_US.UTF-8`.

Early versions of `gawk` used regexp matching code that was not locale aware, so ranges had their traditional interpretation.

When `gawk` switched to using locale-aware regexp matchers, the problems began; especially as both GNU/Linux and commercial Unix vendors started implementing non-ASCII locales, *and making them the default*. Perhaps the most frequently asked question became something like “why does `[A-Z]` match lowercase letters?!?”

This situation existed for close to 10 years, if not more, and the `gawk` maintainer grew weary of trying to explain that `gawk` was being nicely standards-compliant, and that the issue was in the user’s locale. During the development of version 4.0, he modified `gawk` to always treat ranges in the original, pre-POSIX fashion, unless ‘`--posix`’ was used (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

Fortunately, shortly before the final release of `gawk` 4.0, the maintainer learned that the 2008 standard had changed the definition of ranges, such that outside the “C” and “POSIX” locales, the meaning of range expressions was *undefined*.<sup>1</sup>

By using this lovely technical term, the standard gives license to implementors to implement ranges in whatever way they choose. The `gawk` maintainer chose to apply the pre-POSIX meaning in all cases: the default regexp matching; with ‘`--traditional`’, and with ‘`--posix`’; in all cases, `gawk` remains POSIX compliant.

## A.8 Major Contributors to `gawk`

*Always give credit where credit is due.*

Anonymous

This section names the major contributors to `gawk` and/or this book, in approximate chronological order:

- Dr. Alfred V. Aho, Dr. Peter J. Weinberger, and Dr. Brian W. Kernighan, all of Bell Laboratories, designed and implemented Unix `awk`, from which `gawk` gets the majority of its feature set.
- Paul Rubin did the initial design and implementation in 1986, and wrote the first draft (around 40 pages) of this book.
- Jay Fenlason finished the initial implementation.
- Diane Close revised the first draft of this book, bringing it to around 90 pages.
- Richard Stallman helped finish the implementation and the initial draft of this book. He is also the founder of the FSF and the GNU project.
- John Woods contributed parts of the code (mostly fixes) in the initial version of `gawk`.
- In 1988, David Trueman took over primary maintenance of `gawk`, making it compatible with “new” `awk`, and greatly improving its performance.
- Conrad Kwok, Scott Garfinkle, and Kent Williams did the initial ports to MS-DOS with various versions of MSC.
- Pat Rankin provided the VMS port and its documentation.
- Hal Peterson provided help in porting `gawk` to Cray systems. (This is no longer supported.)
- Kai Uwe Rommel provided the initial port to OS/2 and its documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> See [the standard](#) and [its rationale](#).

- Michal Jaegermann provided the port to Atari systems and its documentation. (This port is no longer supported.) He continues to provide portability checking with DEC Alpha systems, and has done a lot of work to make sure `gawk` works on non-32-bit systems.
- Fred Fish provided the port to Amiga systems and its documentation. (With Fred's sad passing, this is no longer supported.)
- Scott Deifik currently maintains the MS-DOS port using DJGPP.
- Eli Zaretskii currently maintains the MS-Windows port using MinGW.
- Juan Grigera provided a port to Windows32 systems. (This is no longer supported.)
- For many years, Dr. Darrel Hankerson acted as coordinator for the various ports to different PC platforms and created binary distributions for various PC operating systems. He was also instrumental in keeping the documentation up to date for the various PC platforms.
- Christos Zoulas provided the `extension()` built-in function for dynamically adding new modules.
- Jürgen Kahrs contributed the initial version of the TCP/IP networking code and documentation, and motivated the inclusion of the `|&` operator.
- Stephen Davies provided the initial port to Tandem systems and its documentation. (However, this is no longer supported.) He was also instrumental in the initial work to integrate the byte-code internals into the `gawk` code base.
- Matthew Woehlke provided improvements for Tandem's POSIX-compliant systems.
- Martin Brown provided the port to BeOS and its documentation. (This is no longer supported.)
- Arno Peters did the initial work to convert `gawk` to use GNU Automake and GNU `gettext`.
- Alan J. Broder provided the initial version of the `asort()` function as well as the code for the optional third argument to the `match()` function.
- Andreas Buening updated the `gawk` port for OS/2.
- Isamu Hasegawa, of IBM in Japan, contributed support for multibyte characters.
- Michael Benzinger contributed the initial code for `switch` statements.
- Patrick T.J. McPhee contributed the code for dynamic loading in Windows32 environments. (This is no longer supported.)
- John Haque reworked the `gawk` internals to use a byte-code engine, providing the `dgawk` debugger for `awk` programs.
- Efraim Yawitz contributed the original text for [Chapter 14 \[dgawk: The awk Debugger\]](#), [page 285](#).
- Arnold Robbins has been working on `gawk` since 1988, at first helping David Trueman, and as the primary maintainer since around 1994.

## Appendix B Installing gawk

This appendix provides instructions for installing `gawk` on the various platforms that are supported by the developers. The primary developer supports GNU/Linux (and Unix), whereas the other ports are contributed. See [Section B.4 \[Reporting Problems and Bugs\]](#), page 320, for the electronic mail addresses of the people who did the respective ports.

### B.1 The gawk Distribution

This section describes how to get the `gawk` distribution, how to extract it, and then what is in the various files and subdirectories.

#### B.1.1 Getting the gawk Distribution

There are three ways to get GNU software:

- Copy it from someone else who already has it.
- Retrieve `gawk` from the Internet host `ftp.gnu.org`, in the directory `‘/gnu/gawk’`. Both anonymous `ftp` and `http` access are supported. If you have the `wget` program, you can use a command like the following:

```
wget http://ftp.gnu.org/gnu/gawk/gawk-4.0.0.tar.gz
```

The GNU software archive is mirrored around the world. The up-to-date list of mirror sites is available from [the main FSF web site](#). Try to use one of the mirrors; they will be less busy, and you can usually find one closer to your site.

#### B.1.2 Extracting the Distribution

`gawk` is distributed as several `tar` files compressed with different compression programs: `gzip`, `bzip2`, and `xz`. For simplicity, the rest of these instructions assume you are using the one compressed with the GNU Zip program, `gzip`.

Once you have the distribution (for example, `‘gawk-4.0.0.tar.gz’`), use `gzip` to expand the file and then use `tar` to extract it. You can use the following pipeline to produce the `gawk` distribution:

```
# Under System V, add 'o' to the tar options
gzip -d -c gawk-4.0.0.tar.gz | tar -xvpf -
```

On a system with GNU `tar`, you can let `tar` do the decompression for you:

```
tar -xvpzf gawk-4.0.0.tar.gz
```

Extracting the archive creates a directory named `‘gawk-4.0.0’` in the current directory.

The distribution file name is of the form `‘gawk-V.R.P.tar.gz’`. The *V* represents the major version of `gawk`, the *R* represents the current release of version *V*, and the *P* represents a *patch level*, meaning that minor bugs have been fixed in the release. The current patch level is 0, but when retrieving distributions, you should get the version with the highest version, release, and patch level. (Note, however, that patch levels greater than or equal to 70 denote “beta” or nonproduction software; you might not want to retrieve such a version unless you don’t mind experimenting.) If you are not on a Unix or GNU/Linux system, you need to make other arrangements for getting and extracting the `gawk` distribution. You should consult a local expert.

### B.1.3 Contents of the gawk Distribution

The `gawk` distribution has a number of C source files, documentation files, subdirectories, and files related to the configuration process (see [Section B.2 \[Compiling and Installing gawk on Unix-like Systems\], page 312](#)), as well as several subdirectories related to different non-Unix operating systems:

Various `.c`, `.y`, and `.h` files

The actual `gawk` source code.

`'README'`

`'README_d/README.*'`

Descriptive files: `'README'` for `gawk` under Unix and the rest for the various hardware and software combinations.

`'INSTALL'` A file providing an overview of the configuration and installation process.

`'ChangeLog'`

A detailed list of source code changes as bugs are fixed or improvements made.

`'ChangeLog.0'`

An older list of source code changes.

`'NEWS'`

A list of changes to `gawk` since the last release or patch.

`'NEWS.0'`

An older list of changes to `gawk`.

`'COPYING'`

The GNU General Public License.

`'FUTURES'`

A brief list of features and changes being contemplated for future releases, with some indication of the time frame for the feature, based on its difficulty.

`'LIMITATIONS'`

A list of those factors that limit `gawk`'s performance. Most of these depend on the hardware or operating system software and are not limits in `gawk` itself.

`'POSIX.STD'`

A description of behaviors in the POSIX standard for `awk` which are left undefined, or where `gawk` may not comply fully, as well as a list of things that the POSIX standard should describe but does not.

`'doc/awkforai.txt'`

A short article describing why `gawk` is a good language for Artificial Intelligence (AI) programming.

`'doc/bc_notes'`

A brief description of `gawk`'s "byte code" internals.

`'doc/README.card'`

`'doc/ad.block'`

`'doc/awkcard.in'`

`'doc/cardfonts'`

`'doc/colors'`

`'doc/macros'`

`'doc/no.colors'`

`'doc/setter.outline'`

The `troff` source for a five-color `awk` reference card. A modern version of `troff` such as GNU `troff` (`groff`) is needed to produce the color version. See the file `'README.card'` for instructions if you have an older `troff`.

`'doc/gawk.1'`

The `troff` source for a manual page describing `gawk`. This is distributed for the convenience of Unix users.

`'doc/gawk.texi'`

The Texinfo source file for this book. It should be processed with `TEX` (via `texi2dvi` or `texi2pdf`) to produce a printed document, and with `makeinfo` to produce an Info or HTML file.

`'doc/gawk.info'`

The generated Info file for this book.

`'doc/gawkinet.texi'`

The Texinfo source file for *TCP/IP Internetworking with gawk*. It should be processed with `TEX` (via `texi2dvi` or `texi2pdf`) to produce a printed document and with `makeinfo` to produce an Info or HTML file.

`'doc/gawkinet.info'`

The generated Info file for *TCP/IP Internetworking with gawk*.

`'doc/igawk.1'`

The `troff` source for a manual page describing the `igawk` program presented in [Section 13.3.9 \[An Easy Way to Use Library Functions\]](#), page 276.

`'doc/Makefile.in'`

The input file used during the configuration process to generate the actual `'Makefile'` for creating the documentation.

`'Makefile.am'`

`'*/Makefile.am'`

Files used by the GNU `automake` software for generating the `'Makefile.in'` files used by `autoconf` and `configure`.

- 'Makefile.in'
- 'aclocal.m4'
- 'config.in'
- 'configure.ac'
- 'configure'
- 'custom.h'
- 'missing\_d/\*'
- 'm4/\*'      These files and subdirectories are used when configuring `gawk` for various Unix systems. They are explained in [Section B.2 \[Compiling and Installing `gawk` on Unix-like Systems\]](#), page 312.
- 'po/\*'      The 'po' library contains message translations.
- 'awklib/extract.awk'
- 'awklib/Makefile.am'
- 'awklib/Makefile.in'
- 'awklib/eg/\*'
  - The 'awklib' directory contains a copy of 'extract.awk' (see [Section 13.3.7 \[Extracting Programs from Texinfo Source Files\]](#), page 271), which can be used to extract the sample programs from the Texinfo source file for this book. It also contains a 'Makefile.in' file, which `configure` uses to generate a 'Makefile'. 'Makefile.am' is used by GNU Automake to create 'Makefile.in'. The library functions from [Chapter 12 \[A Library of `awk` Functions\]](#), page 211, and the `igawk` program from [Section 13.3.9 \[An Easy Way to Use Library Functions\]](#), page 276, are included as ready-to-use files in the `gawk` distribution. They are installed as part of the installation process. The rest of the programs in this book are available in appropriate subdirectories of 'awklib/eg'.
- 'posix/\*'    Files needed for building `gawk` on POSIX-compliant systems.
- 'pc/\*'      Files needed for building `gawk` under MS-Windows and OS/2 (see [Section B.3.1 \[Installation on PC Operating Systems\]](#), page 314, for details).
- 'vms/\*'      Files needed for building `gawk` under VMS (see [Section B.3.2 \[How to Compile and Install `gawk` on VMS\]](#), page 318, for details).
- 'test/\*'    A test suite for `gawk`. You can use 'make check' from the top-level `gawk` directory to run your version of `gawk` against the test suite. If `gawk` successfully passes 'make check', then you can be confident of a successful port.

## B.2 Compiling and Installing `gawk` on Unix-like Systems

Usually, you can compile and install `gawk` by typing only two commands. However, if you use an unusual system, you may need to configure `gawk` for your system yourself.

### B.2.1 Compiling `gawk` for Unix-like Systems

The normal installation steps should work on all modern commercial Unix-derived systems, GNU/Linux, BSD-based systems, and the Cygwin environment for MS-Windows.

After you have extracted the `gawk` distribution, `cd` to '`gawk-4.0.0`'. Like most GNU software, `gawk` is configured automatically for your system by running the `configure` program. This program is a Bourne shell script that is generated automatically using GNU

`autoconf`. (The `autoconf` software is described fully in *Autoconf—Generating Automatic Configuration Scripts*, which can be found online at [the Free Software Foundation’s web site](#).)

To configure `gawk`, simply run `configure`:

```
sh ./configure
```

This produces a ‘`Makefile`’ and ‘`config.h`’ tailored to your system. The ‘`config.h`’ file describes various facts about your system. You might want to edit the ‘`Makefile`’ to change the `CFLAGS` variable, which controls the command-line options that are passed to the C compiler (such as optimization levels or compiling for debugging).

Alternatively, you can add your own values for most `make` variables on the command line, such as `CC` and `CFLAGS`, when running `configure`:

```
CC=cc CFLAGS=-g sh ./configure
```

See the file ‘`INSTALL`’ in the `gawk` distribution for all the details.

After you have run `configure` and possibly edited the ‘`Makefile`’, type:

```
make
```

Shortly thereafter, you should have an executable version of `gawk`. That’s all there is to it! To verify that `gawk` is working properly, run ‘`make check`’. All of the tests should succeed. If these steps do not work, or if any of the tests fail, check the files in the ‘`README_d`’ directory to see if you’ve found a known problem. If the failure is not described there, please send in a bug report (see [Section B.4 \[Reporting Problems and Bugs\]](#), page 320).

## B.2.2 Additional Configuration Options

There are several additional options you may use on the `configure` command line when compiling `gawk` from scratch, including:

### `--disable-lint`

Disable all lint checking within `gawk`. The ‘`--lint`’ and ‘`--lint-old`’ options (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25) are accepted, but silently do nothing. Similarly, setting the `LINT` variable (see [Section 7.5.1 \[Built-in Variables That Control awk\]](#), page 127) has no effect on the running `awk` program.

When used with GCC’s automatic dead-code-elimination, this option cuts almost 200K bytes off the size of the `gawk` executable on GNU/Linux x86 systems. Results on other systems and with other compilers are likely to vary. Using this option may bring you some slight performance improvement.

Using this option will cause some of the tests in the test suite to fail. This option may be removed at a later date.

### `--disable-nls`

Disable all message-translation facilities. This is usually not desirable, but it may bring you some slight performance improvement.

### `--with-whiny-user-strftime`

Force use of the included version of the `strftime()` function for deficient systems.

Use the command ‘`./configure --help`’ to see the full list of options that `configure` supplies.

### B.2.3 The Configuration Process

This section is of interest only if you know something about using the C language and Unix-like operating systems.

The source code for `gawk` generally attempts to adhere to formal standards wherever possible. This means that `gawk` uses library routines that are specified by the ISO C standard and by the POSIX operating system interface standard. The `gawk` source code requires using an ISO C compiler (the 1990 standard).

Many Unix systems do not support all of either the ISO or the POSIX standards. The `'missing_d'` subdirectory in the `gawk` distribution contains replacement versions of those functions that are most likely to be missing.

The `'config.h'` file that `configure` creates contains definitions that describe features of the particular operating system where you are attempting to compile `gawk`. The three things described by this file are: what header files are available, so that they can be correctly included, what (supposedly) standard functions are actually available in your C libraries, and various miscellaneous facts about your operating system. For example, there may not be an `st_blksize` element in the `stat` structure. In this case, `'HAVE_ST_BLKSIZE'` is undefined.

It is possible for your C compiler to lie to `configure`. It may do so by not exiting with an error when a library function is not available. To get around this, edit the file `'custom.h'`. Use an `'#ifdef'` that is appropriate for your system, and either `#define` any constants that `configure` should have defined but didn't, or `#undef` any constants that `configure` defined and should not have. `'custom.h'` is automatically included by `'config.h'`.

It is also possible that the `configure` program generated by `autoconf` will not work on your system in some other fashion. If you do have a problem, the file `'configure.ac'` is the input for `autoconf`. You may be able to change this file and generate a new version of `configure` that works on your system (see [Section B.4 \[Reporting Problems and Bugs\], page 320](#), for information on how to report problems in configuring `gawk`). The same mechanism may be used to send in updates to `'configure.ac'` and/or `'custom.h'`.

## B.3 Installation on Other Operating Systems

This section describes how to install `gawk` on various non-Unix systems.

### B.3.1 Installation on PC Operating Systems

This section covers installation and usage of `gawk` on x86 machines running MS-DOS, any version of MS-Windows, or OS/2. In this section, the term “Windows32” refers to any of Microsoft Windows-95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP/Vista/7.

The limitations of MS-DOS (and MS-DOS shells under Windows32 or OS/2) has meant that various “DOS extenders” are often used with programs such as `gawk`. The varying capabilities of Microsoft Windows 3.1 and Windows32 can add to the confusion. For an overview of the considerations, please refer to `'README_d/README.pc'` in the distribution.

#### B.3.1.1 Installing a Prepared Distribution for PC Systems

If you have received a binary distribution prepared by the MS-DOS maintainers, then `gawk` and the necessary support files appear under the `'gnu'` directory, with executables in

‘gnu/bin’, libraries in ‘gnu/lib/awk’, and manual pages under ‘gnu/man’. This is designed for easy installation to a ‘gnu’ directory on your drive—however, the files can be installed anywhere provided AWKPATH is set properly. Regardless of the installation directory, the first line of ‘igawk.cmd’ and ‘igawk.bat’ (in ‘gnu/bin’) may need to be edited.

The binary distribution contains a separate file describing the contents. In particular, it may include more than one version of the **gawk** executable.

OS/2 (32 bit, EMX) binary distributions are prepared for the ‘usr’ directory of your preferred drive. Set UNIXROOT to your installation drive (e.g., ‘e:’) if you want to install **gawk** onto another drive than the hardcoded default ‘c:’. Executables appear in ‘usr/bin’, libraries under ‘usr/share/awk’, manual pages under ‘usr/man’, Texinfo documentation under ‘usr/info’, and NLS files under ‘usr/share/locale’. Note that the files can be installed anywhere provided AWKPATH is set properly.

If you already have a file ‘usr/info/dir’ from another package *do not overwrite it!* Instead enter the following commands at your prompt (replace ‘x:’ by your installation drive):

```
install-info --info-dir=x:/usr/info x:/usr/info/gawk.info
install-info --info-dir=x:/usr/info x:/usr/info/gawkinet.info
```

The binary distribution may contain a separate file containing additional or more detailed installation instructions.

### B.3.1.2 Compiling gawk for PC Operating Systems

**gawk** can be compiled for MS-DOS, Windows32, and OS/2 using the GNU development tools from DJ Delorie (DJGPP: MS-DOS only) or Eberhard Mattes (EMX: MS-DOS, Windows32 and OS/2). The file ‘README\_d/README.pc’ in the **gawk** distribution contains additional notes, and ‘pc/Makefile’ contains important information on compilation options.

To build **gawk** for MS-DOS and Windows32, copy the files in the ‘pc’ directory (*except* for ‘ChangeLog’) to the directory with the rest of the **gawk** sources, then invoke **make** with the appropriate target name as an argument to build **gawk**. The ‘Makefile’ copied from the ‘pc’ directory contains a configuration section with comments and may need to be edited in order to work with your **make** utility.

The ‘Makefile’ supports a number of targets for building various MS-DOS and Windows32 versions. A list of targets is printed if the **make** command is given without a target. As an example, to build **gawk** using the DJGPP tools, enter ‘make djgpp’. (The DJGPP tools needed for the build may be found at <ftp://ftp.delorie.com/pub/djgpp/current/v2gnu/>.) To build a native MS-Windows binary of **gawk**, type ‘make mingw32’.

The 32 bit EMX version of **gawk** works “out of the box” under OS/2. However, it is highly recommended to use GCC 2.95.3 for the compilation. In principle, it is possible to compile **gawk** the following way:

```
$ ./configure
$ make
```

This is not recommended, though. To get an OMF executable you should use the following commands at your **sh** prompt:

```
$ CFLAGS="-O2 -Zomf -Zmt"
```

```

$ export CFLAGS
$ LDFLAGS="-s -Zcrt.dll -Zlinker /exepack:2 -Zlinker /pm:vio -Zstack 0x6000"
$ export LDFLAGS
$ RANLIB="echo"
$ export RANLIB
$ ./configure --prefix=c:/usr
$ make AR=emxomfar

```

These are just suggestions for use with GCC 2.x. You may use any other set of (self-consistent) environment variables and compiler flags.

If you use GCC 2.95 it is recommended to use also:

```

$ LIBS="-lgcc"
$ export LIBS

```

You can also get an a.out executable if you prefer:

```

$ CFLAGS="-O2 -Zmt"
$ export CFLAGS
$ LDFLAGS="-s -Zstack 0x6000"
$ LIBS="-lgcc"
$ unset RANLIB
$ ./configure --prefix=c:/usr
$ make

```

**NOTE:** Compilation of a.out executables also works with GCC 3.2. Versions later than GCC 3.2 have not been tested successfully.

'make install' works as expected with the EMX build.

**NOTE:** Ancient OS/2 ports of GNU `make` are not able to handle the Makefiles of this package. If you encounter any problems with `make`, try GNU Make 3.79.1 or later versions. You should find the latest version on <ftp://hobbes.nmsu.edu/pub/os2/>.

### B.3.1.3 Testing gawk on PC Operating Systems

Using `make` to run the standard tests and to install `gawk` requires additional Unix-like tools, including `sh`, `sed`, and `cp`. In order to run the tests, the 'test/\*.ok' files may need to be converted so that they have the usual MS-DOS-style end-of-line markers. Alternatively, run `make check CMP="diff -a"` to use GNU `diff` in text mode instead of `cmp` to compare the resulting files.

Most of the tests work properly with Stewartson's shell along with the companion utilities or appropriate GNU utilities. However, some editing of 'test/Makefile' is required. It is recommended that you copy the file 'pc/Makefile.tst' over the file 'test/Makefile' as a replacement. Details can be found in 'README\_d/README.pc' and in the file 'pc/Makefile.tst'.

On OS/2 the `pid` test fails because `spawnl()` is used instead of `fork()/execl()` to start child processes. Also the `mbfw1` and `mbprintf1` tests fail because the needed multibyte functionality is not available.

### B.3.1.4 Using gawk on PC Operating Systems

With the exception of the Cygwin environment, the '|&' operator and TCP/IP networking (see [Section 11.4 \[Using gawk for Network Programming\], page 205](#)) are not supported for MS-DOS or MS-Windows. EMX (OS/2 only) does support at least the '|&' operator.

The MS-DOS and MS-Windows versions of **gawk** search for program files as described in [Section 2.5.1 \[The AWKPATH Environment Variable\], page 32](#). However, semicolons (rather than colons) separate elements in the **AWKPATH** variable. If **AWKPATH** is not set or is empty, then the default search path for MS-Windows and MS-DOS versions is `".;c:/lib/awk;c:/gnu/lib/awk"`.

The search path for OS/2 (32 bit, EMX) is determined by the prefix directory (most likely `/usr` or `c:/usr`) that has been specified as an option of the **configure** script like it is the case for the Unix versions. If `c:/usr` is the prefix directory then the default search path contains `.` and `c:/usr/share/awk`. Additionally, to support binary distributions of **gawk** for OS/2 systems whose drive `c:` might not support long file names or might not exist at all, there is a special environment variable. If **UNIXROOT** specifies a drive then this specific drive is also searched for program files. E.g., if **UNIXROOT** is set to `e:` the complete default search path is `".;c:/usr/share/awk;e:/usr/share/awk"`.

An **sh**-like shell (as opposed to **command.com** under MS-DOS or **cmd.exe** under MS-Windows or OS/2) may be useful for **awk** programming. The DJGPP collection of tools includes an MS-DOS port of **Bash**, and several shells are available for OS/2, including **ksh**.

Under MS-Windows, OS/2 and MS-DOS, **gawk** (and many other text programs) silently translate end-of-line `"\r\n"` to `"\n"` on input and `"\n"` to `"\r\n"` on output. A special **BINMODE** variable (c.e.) allows control over these translations and is interpreted as follows:

- If **BINMODE** is `"r"`, or one, then binary mode is set on read (i.e., no translations on reads).
- If **BINMODE** is `"w"`, or two, then binary mode is set on write (i.e., no translations on writes).
- If **BINMODE** is `"rw"` or `"wr"` or three, binary mode is set for both read and write.
- **BINMODE=non-null-string** is the same as `'BINMODE=3'` (i.e., no translations on reads or writes). However, **gawk** issues a warning message if the string is not one of `"rw"` or `"wr"`.

The modes for standard input and standard output are set one time only (after the command line is read, but before processing any of the **awk** program). Setting **BINMODE** for standard input or standard output is accomplished by using an appropriate `'-v BINMODE=N'` option on the command line. **BINMODE** is set at the time a file or pipe is opened and cannot be changed mid-stream.

The name **BINMODE** was chosen to match **mawk** (see [Section B.5 \[Other Freely Available awk Implementations\], page 321](#)). **mawk** and **gawk** handle **BINMODE** similarly; however, **mawk** adds a `'-W BINMODE=N'` option and an environment variable that can set **BINMODE**, **RS**, and **ORS**. The files `'binmode[1-3].awk'` (under `'gnu/lib/awk'` in some of the prepared distributions) have been chosen to match **mawk**'s `'-W BINMODE=N'` option. These can be changed or discarded; in particular, the setting of **RS** giving the fewest "surprises" is open to debate. **mawk** uses `'RS = "\r\n"'` if binary mode is set on read, which is appropriate for files with the MS-DOS-style end-of-line.

To illustrate, the following examples set binary mode on writes for standard output and other files, and set ORS as the “usual” MS-DOS-style end-of-line:

```
gawk -v BINMODE=2 -v ORS="\r\n" ...
```

or:

```
gawk -v BINMODE=w -f binmode2.awk ...
```

These give the same result as the ‘-W BINMODE=2’ option in `mawk`. The following changes the record separator to “\r\n” and sets binary mode on reads, but does not affect the mode on standard input:

```
gawk -v RS="\r\n" --source "BEGIN { BINMODE = 1 }" ...
```

or:

```
gawk -f binmode1.awk ...
```

With proper quoting, in the first example the setting of `RS` can be moved into the `BEGIN` rule.

### B.3.1.5 Using gawk In The Cygwin Environment

`gawk` can be built and used “out of the box” under MS-Windows if you are using the [Cygwin environment](#). This environment provides an excellent simulation of Unix, using the GNU tools, such as Bash, the GNU Compiler Collection (GCC), GNU Make, and other GNU programs. Compilation and installation for Cygwin is the same as for a Unix system:

```
tar -xvpzf gawk-4.0.0.tar.gz
cd gawk-4.0.0
./configure
make
```

When compared to GNU/Linux on the same system, the ‘`configure`’ step on Cygwin takes considerably longer. However, it does finish, and then the ‘`make`’ proceeds as usual.

**NOTE:** The ‘`|&`’ operator and TCP/IP networking (see [Section 11.4 \[Using gawk for Network Programming\]](#), page 205) are fully supported in the Cygwin environment. This is not true for any other environment on MS-Windows.

### B.3.1.6 Using gawk In The MSYS Environment

In the MSYS environment under MS-Windows, `gawk` automatically uses binary mode for reading and writing files. Thus there is no need to use the `BINMODE` variable.

This can cause problems with other Unix-like components that have been ported to MS-Windows that expect `gawk` to do automatic translation of “\r\n”, since it won’t. Caveat Emptor!

## B.3.2 How to Compile and Install gawk on VMS

This subsection describes how to compile and install `gawk` under VMS. The older designation “VMS” is used throughout to refer to OpenVMS.

### B.3.2.1 Compiling gawk on VMS

To compile `gawk` under VMS, there is a DCL command procedure that issues all the necessary `CC` and `LINK` commands. There is also a ‘`Makefile`’ for use with the `MMS` utility. From the source directory, use either:

```
$ @[.VMS]VMSBUILD.COM
```

or:

```
$ MMS/DESCRIPTION=[.VMS]DESCRIP.MMS GAWK
```

Older versions of `gawk` could be built with VAX C or GNU C on VAX/VMS, as well as with DEC C, but that is no longer supported. DEC C (also briefly known as “Compaq C” and now known as “HP C,” but referred to here as “DEC C”) is required. Both `VMSBUILD.COM` and `DESCRIP.MMS` contain some obsolete support for the older compilers but are set up to use DEC C by default.

`gawk` has been tested under Alpha/VMS 7.3-1 using Compaq C V6.4, and on Alpha/VMS 7.3, Alpha/VMS 7.3-2, and IA64/VMS 8.3.<sup>1</sup>

### B.3.2.2 Installing gawk on VMS

To install `gawk`, all you need is a “foreign” command, which is a DCL symbol whose value begins with a dollar sign. For example:

```
$ GAWK := $disk1:[gnubin]GAWK
```

Substitute the actual location of `gawk.exe` for `‘$disk1:[gnubin]’`. The symbol should be placed in the `‘login.com’` of any user who wants to run `gawk`, so that it is defined every time the user logs on. Alternatively, the symbol may be placed in the system-wide `‘sylogin.com’` procedure, which allows all users to run `gawk`.

Optionally, the help entry can be loaded into a VMS help library:

```
$ LIBRARY/HELP SYS$HELP:HELPLIB [.VMS]GAWK.HLP
```

(You may want to substitute a site-specific help library rather than the standard VMS library `‘HELPLIB’`.) After loading the help text, the command:

```
$ HELP GAWK
```

provides information about both the `gawk` implementation and the `awk` programming language.

The logical name `‘AWK_LIBRARY’` can designate a default location for `awk` program files. For the `‘-f’` option, if the specified file name has no device or directory path information in it, `gawk` looks in the current directory first, then in the directory specified by the translation of `‘AWK_LIBRARY’` if the file is not found. If, after searching in both directories, the file still is not found, `gawk` appends the suffix `‘.awk’` to the filename and retries the file search. If `‘AWK_LIBRARY’` has no definition, a default value of `‘SYS$LIBRARY:’` is used for it.

### B.3.2.3 Running gawk on VMS

Command-line parsing and quoting conventions are significantly different on VMS, so examples in this book or from other sources often need minor changes. They *are* minor though, and all `awk` programs should run correctly.

Here are a couple of trivial tests:

```
$ gawk -- "BEGIN {print ""Hello, World!""}"
$ gawk -"W" version
! could also be -"W version" or "-W version"
```

<sup>1</sup> The IA64 architecture is also known as “Itanium.”

Note that uppercase and mixed-case text must be quoted.

The VMS port of `gawk` includes a DCL-style interface in addition to the original shell-style interface (see the help entry for details). One side effect of dual command-line parsing is that if there is only a single parameter (as in the quoted string program above), the command becomes ambiguous. To work around this, the normally optional `--` flag is required to force Unix-style parsing rather than DCL parsing. If any other dash-type options (or multiple parameters such as data files to process) are present, there is no ambiguity and `--` can be omitted.

The default search path, when looking for `awk` program files specified by the `-f` option, is `"SYS$DISK: [], AWK_LIBRARY: "`. The logical name `AWKPATH` can be used to override this default. The format of `AWKPATH` is a comma-separated list of directory specifications. When defining it, the value should be quoted so that it retains a single translation and not a multitranslation RMS searchlist.

### B.3.2.4 Some VMS Systems Have An Old Version of `gawk`

Some versions of VMS have an old version of `gawk`. To access it, define a symbol, as follows:

```
$ gawk := $sys$common:[syshlp.examples.tcpip.snmp]gawk.exe
```

This is apparently version 2.15.6, which is extremely old. We recommend compiling and using the current version.

## B.4 Reporting Problems and Bugs

*There is nothing more dangerous than a bored archeologist.*

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

If you have problems with `gawk` or think that you have found a bug, please report it to the developers; we cannot promise to do anything but we might well want to fix it.

Before reporting a bug, make sure you have actually found a real bug. Carefully reread the documentation and see if it really says you can do what you're trying to do. If it's not clear whether you should be able to do something or not, report that too; it's a bug in the documentation!

Before reporting a bug or trying to fix it yourself, try to isolate it to the smallest possible `awk` program and input data file that reproduces the problem. Then send us the program and data file, some idea of what kind of Unix system you're using, the compiler you used to compile `gawk`, and the exact results `gawk` gave you. Also say what you expected to occur; this helps us decide whether the problem is really in the documentation.

Please include the version number of `gawk` you are using. You can get this information with the command `'gawk --version'`.

Once you have a precise problem, send email to [bug-gawk@gnu.org](mailto:bug-gawk@gnu.org).

Using this address automatically sends a copy of your mail to me. If necessary, I can be reached directly at [arnold@skeeve.com](mailto:arnold@skeeve.com). The bug reporting address is preferred since the email list is archived at the GNU Project. *All email should be in English, since that is my native language.*

**CAUTION:** Do *not* try to report bugs in `gawk` by posting to the Usenet/Internet newsgroup `comp.lang.awk`. While the `gawk` developers do occasionally read

this newsgroup, there is no guarantee that we will see your posting. The steps described above are the official recognized ways for reporting bugs. Really.

**NOTE:** Many distributions of GNU/Linux and the various BSD-based operating systems have their own bug reporting systems. If you report a bug using your distribution's bug reporting system, *please* also send a copy to [bug-gawk@gnu.org](mailto:bug-gawk@gnu.org).

This is for two reasons. First, while some distributions forward bug reports “upstream” to the GNU mailing list, many don't, so there is a good chance that the **gawk** maintainer won't even see the bug report! Second, mail to the GNU list is archived, and having everything at the GNU project keeps things self-contained and not dependant on other web sites.

Non-bug suggestions are always welcome as well. If you have questions about things that are unclear in the documentation or are just obscure features, ask me; I will try to help you out, although I may not have the time to fix the problem. You can send me electronic mail at the Internet address noted previously.

If you find bugs in one of the non-Unix ports of **gawk**, please send an electronic mail message to the person who maintains that port. They are named in the following list, as well as in the ‘README’ file in the **gawk** distribution. Information in the ‘README’ file should be considered authoritative if it conflicts with this book.

The people maintaining the non-Unix ports of **gawk** are as follows:

MS-DOS with DJGPP	Scott Deifik, <a href="mailto:scottd.mail@sbcglobal.net">scottd.mail@sbcglobal.net</a> .
MS-Windows with MINGW	Eli Zaretskii, <a href="mailto:eliz@gnu.org">eliz@gnu.org</a> .
OS/2	Andreas Buening, <a href="mailto:andreas.buening@nexgo.de">andreas.buening@nexgo.de</a> .
VMS	Pat Rankin, <a href="mailto:rankin@pactechdata.com">rankin@pactechdata.com</a> .
z/OS (OS/390)	Dave Pitts, <a href="mailto:dpitts@cozx.com">dpitts@cozx.com</a> .

If your bug is also reproducible under Unix, please send a copy of your report to the [bug-gawk@gnu.org](mailto:bug-gawk@gnu.org) email list as well.

## B.5 Other Freely Available awk Implementations

*It's kind of fun to put comments like this in your awk code.*

```
// Do C++ comments work? answer: yes! of course
```

Michael Brennan

There are a number of other freely available **awk** implementations. This section briefly describes where to get them:

**Unix awk** Brian Kernighan, one of the original designers of Unix **awk**, has made his implementation of **awk** freely available. You can retrieve this version via the World Wide Web from [his home page](#). It is available in several archive formats:

Shell archive

<http://www.cs.princeton.edu/~bwk/btl.mirror/awk.shar>

Compressed tar file

<http://www.cs.princeton.edu/~bwk/btl.mirror/awk.tar.gz>

Zip file

<http://www.cs.princeton.edu/~bwk/btl.mirror/awk.zip>

This version requires an ISO C (1990 standard) compiler; the C compiler from GCC (the GNU Compiler Collection) works quite nicely.

See [Section A.6 \[Common Extensions Summary\]](#), page 305, for a list of extensions in this `awk` that are not in POSIX `awk`.

**mawk** Michael Brennan wrote an independent implementation of `awk`, called `mawk`. It is available under the GPL (see [\[GNU General Public License\]](#), page 357), just as `gawk` is.

The original distribution site for the `mawk` source code no longer has it. A copy is available at <http://www.skeeve.com/gawk/mawk1.3.3.tar.gz>.

In 2009, Thomas Dickey took on `mawk` maintenance. Basic information is available on [the project's web page](#). The download URL is <http://invisible-island.net/datafiles/release/mawk.tar.gz>.

Once you have it, `gunzip` may be used to decompress this file. Installation is similar to `gawk`'s (see [Section B.2 \[Compiling and Installing gawk on Unix-like Systems\]](#), page 312).

See [Section A.6 \[Common Extensions Summary\]](#), page 305, for a list of extensions in `mawk` that are not in POSIX `awk`.

**awka** Written by Andrew Sumner, `awka` translates `awk` programs into C, compiles them, and links them with a library of functions that provides the core `awk` functionality. It also has a number of extensions.

The `awk` translator is released under the GPL, and the library is under the LGPL.

To get `awka`, go to <http://sourceforge.net/projects/awka>.

The project seems to be frozen; no new code changes have been made since approximately 2003.

**pawk** Nelson H.F. Beebe at the University of Utah has modified Brian Kernighan's `awk` to provide timing and profiling information. It is different from `pgawk` (see [Section 11.5 \[Profiling Your awk Programs\]](#), page 206), in that it uses CPU-based profiling, not line-count profiling. You may find it at either <ftp://ftp.math.utah.edu/pub/pawk/pawk-20030606.tar.gz> or <http://www.math.utah.edu/pub/pawk/pawk-20030606.tar.gz>.

**Busybox Awk**

Busybox is a GPL-licensed program providing small versions of many applications within a single executable. It is aimed at embedded systems. It includes a full implementation of POSIX `awk`. When building it, be careful not to do `'make install'` as it will overwrite copies of other applications in your `'/usr/local/bin'`. For more information, see the [project's home page](#).

**The OpenSolaris POSIX awk**

The version of `awk` in `'/usr/xpg4/bin'` on Solaris is more-or-less POSIX-compliant. It is based on the `awk` from Mortice Kern Systems for PCs. The

source code can be downloaded from the [OpenSolaris web site](#). This author was able to make it compile and work under GNU/Linux with 1–2 hours of work. Making it more generally portable (using GNU Autoconf and/or Automake) would take more work, and this has not been done, at least to our knowledge.

- jawk** This is an interpreter for **awk** written in Java. It claims to be a full interpreter, although because it uses Java facilities for I/O and for regexp matching, the language it supports is different from POSIX **awk**. More information is available on the [project's home page](#).
- Libmawk** This is an embeddable **awk** interpreter derived from **mawk**. For more information see <http://repo.hu/projects/libmawk/>.
- QSE Awk** This is an embeddable **awk** interpreter. For more information see <http://code.google.com/p/qse/> and <http://awk.info/?tools/qse>.
- QTawk** This is an independent implementation of **awk** distributed under the GPL. It has a large number of extensions over standard **awk** and may not be 100% syntactically compatible with it. See <http://www.quiktrim.org/QTawk.html> for more information, including the manual and a download link.
- xgawk** XML **gawk**. This is a fork of the **gawk** 3.1.6 source base to support processing XML files. It has a number of interesting extensions which should one day be integrated into the main **gawk** code base. For more information, see [the XMLgawk project web site](#).



## Appendix C Implementation Notes

This appendix contains information mainly of interest to implementers and maintainers of `gawk`. Everything in it applies specifically to `gawk` and not to other implementations.

### C.1 Downward Compatibility and Debugging

See [Section A.5 \[Extensions in `gawk` Not in POSIX `awk`\]](#), page 303, for a summary of the GNU extensions to the `awk` language and program. All of these features can be turned off by invoking `gawk` with the `--traditional` option or with the `--posix` option.

If `gawk` is compiled for debugging with `-DDEBUG`, then there is one more option available on the command line:

`-Y`

`--parsedebug`

Prints out the parse stack information as the program is being parsed.

This option is intended only for serious `gawk` developers and not for the casual user. It probably has not even been compiled into your version of `gawk`, since it slows down execution.

### C.2 Making Additions to `gawk`

If you find that you want to enhance `gawk` in a significant fashion, you are perfectly free to do so. That is the point of having free software; the source code is available and you are free to change it as you want (see [\[GNU General Public License\]](#), page 357).

This section discusses the ways you might want to change `gawk` as well as any considerations you should bear in mind.

#### C.2.1 Accessing The `gawk` Git Repository

As `gawk` is Free Software, the source code is always available. [Section B.1 \[The `gawk` Distribution\]](#), page 309, describes how to get and build the formal, released versions of `gawk`.

However, if you want to modify `gawk` and contribute back your changes, you will probably wish to work with the development version. To do so, you will need to access the `gawk` source code repository. The code is maintained using the [Git distributed version control system](#). You will need to install it if your system doesn't have it. Once you have done so, use the command:

```
git clone git://git.savannah.gnu.org/gawk.git
```

This will clone the `gawk` repository. If you are behind a firewall that will not allow you to use the Git native protocol, you can still access the repository using:

```
git clone http://git.savannah.gnu.org/r/gawk.git
```

Once you have made changes, you can use `git diff` to produce a patch, and send that to the `gawk` maintainer; see [Section B.4 \[Reporting Problems and Bugs\]](#), page 320 for how to do that.

Finally, if you cannot install Git (e.g., if it hasn't been ported yet to your operating system), you can use the Git-CVS gateway to check out a copy using CVS, as follows:

```
cvs -d:pserver:anonymous@pserver.git.sv.gnu.org:/gawk.git co -d gawk master
```

## C.2.2 Adding New Features

You are free to add any new features you like to `gawk`. However, if you want your changes to be incorporated into the `gawk` distribution, there are several steps that you need to take in order to make it possible to include your changes:

1. Before building the new feature into `gawk` itself, consider writing it as an extension module (see [Section C.3 \[Adding New Built-in Functions to gawk\]](#), page 328). If that's not possible, continue with the rest of the steps in this list.
2. Be prepared to sign the appropriate paperwork. In order for the FSF to distribute your changes, you must either place those changes in the public domain and submit a signed statement to that effect, or assign the copyright in your changes to the FSF. Both of these actions are easy to do and *many* people have done so already. If you have questions, please contact me (see [Section B.4 \[Reporting Problems and Bugs\]](#), page 320), or [assign@gnu.org](mailto:assign@gnu.org).
3. Get the latest version. It is much easier for me to integrate changes if they are relative to the most recent distributed version of `gawk`. If your version of `gawk` is very old, I may not be able to integrate them at all. (See [Section B.1.1 \[Getting the gawk Distribution\]](#), page 309, for information on getting the latest version of `gawk`.)
4. Follow the *GNU Coding Standards*. This document describes how GNU software should be written. If you haven't read it, please do so, preferably *before* starting to modify `gawk`. (The *GNU Coding Standards* are available from the GNU Project's [web site](#). Texinfo, Info, and DVI versions are also available.)
5. Use the `gawk` coding style. The C code for `gawk` follows the instructions in the *GNU Coding Standards*, with minor exceptions. The code is formatted using the traditional "K&R" style, particularly as regards to the placement of braces and the use of TABs. In brief, the coding rules for `gawk` are as follows:
  - Use ANSI/ISO style (prototype) function headers when defining functions.
  - Put the name of the function at the beginning of its own line.
  - Put the return type of the function, even if it is `int`, on the line above the line with the name and arguments of the function.
  - Put spaces around parentheses used in control structures (`if`, `while`, `for`, `do`, `switch`, and `return`).
  - Do not put spaces in front of parentheses used in function calls.
  - Put spaces around all C operators and after commas in function calls.
  - Do not use the comma operator to produce multiple side effects, except in `for` loop initialization and increment parts, and in macro bodies.
  - Use real TABs for indenting, not spaces.
  - Use the "K&R" brace layout style.
  - Use comparisons against `NULL` and `'\0'` in the conditions of `if`, `while`, and `for` statements, as well as in the cases of `switch` statements, instead of just the plain pointer or character value.
  - Use the `TRUE`, `FALSE` and `NULL` symbolic constants and the character constant `'\0'` where appropriate, instead of `1` and `0`.
  - Provide one-line descriptive comments for each function.

- Do not use the `alloca()` function for allocating memory off the stack. Its use causes more portability trouble than is worth the minor benefit of not having to free the storage. Instead, use `malloc()` and `free()`.
- Do not use comparisons of the form `! strcmp(a, b)` or similar. As Henry Spencer once said, “`strcmp()` is not a boolean!” Instead, use `strcmp(a, b) == 0`.
- If adding new bit flag values, use explicit hexadecimal constants (`0x001`, `0x002`, `0x004`, and so on) instead of shifting one left by successive amounts (`(1<<0)`, `(1<<1)`, and so on).

**NOTE:** If I have to reformat your code to follow the coding style used in `gawk`, I may not bother to integrate your changes at all.

6. Update the documentation. Along with your new code, please supply new sections and/or chapters for this book. If at all possible, please use real Texinfo, instead of just supplying unformatted ASCII text (although even that is better than no documentation at all). Conventions to be followed in *GAWK: Effective AWK Programming* are provided after the `@bye` at the end of the Texinfo source file. If possible, please update the `man` page as well.

You will also have to sign paperwork for your documentation changes.

7. Submit changes as unified diffs. Use `diff -u -r -N` to compare the original `gawk` source tree with your version. I recommend using the GNU version of `diff`. Send the output produced by either run of `diff` to me when you submit your changes. (See [Section B.4 \[Reporting Problems and Bugs\]](#), page 320, for the electronic mail information.)

Using this format makes it easy for me to apply your changes to the master version of the `gawk` source code (using `patch`). If I have to apply the changes manually, using a text editor, I may not do so, particularly if there are lots of changes.

8. Include an entry for the `ChangeLog` file with your submission. This helps further minimize the amount of work I have to do, making it easier for me to accept patches.

Although this sounds like a lot of work, please remember that while you may write the new code, I have to maintain it and support it. If it isn't possible for me to do that with a minimum of extra work, then I probably will not.

### C.2.3 Porting `gawk` to a New Operating System

If you want to port `gawk` to a new operating system, there are several steps:

1. Follow the guidelines in the previous section concerning coding style, submission of diffs, and so on.
2. Be prepared to sign the appropriate paperwork. In order for the FSF to distribute your code, you must either place your code in the public domain and submit a signed statement to that effect, or assign the copyright in your code to the FSF.
3. When doing a port, bear in mind that your code must coexist peacefully with the rest of `gawk` and the other ports. Avoid gratuitous changes to the system-independent parts of the code. If at all possible, avoid sprinkling `#ifdef`'s just for your port throughout the code.

If the changes needed for a particular system affect too much of the code, I probably will not accept them. In such a case, you can, of course, distribute your changes on

your own, as long as you comply with the GPL (see [\[GNU General Public License\]](#), page 357).

4. A number of the files that come with `gawk` are maintained by other people. Thus, you should not change them unless it is for a very good reason; i.e., changes are not out of the question, but changes to these files are scrutinized extra carefully. The files are `'dfa.c'`, `'dfa.h'`, `'getopt1.c'`, `'getopt.c'`, `'getopt.h'`, `'install-sh'`, `'mkinstalldirs'`, `'regcomp.c'`, `'regex.c'`, `'regexexec.c'`, `'regexex.c'`, `'regex.h'`, `'regex_internal.c'`, and `'regex_internal.h'`.
5. Be willing to continue to maintain the port. Non-Unix operating systems are supported by volunteers who maintain the code needed to compile and run `gawk` on their systems. If noone volunteers to maintain a port, it becomes unsupported and it may be necessary to remove it from the distribution.
6. Supply an appropriate `'gawkmisc.???'` file. Each port has its own `'gawkmisc.???'` that implements certain operating system specific functions. This is cleaner than a plethora of `'#ifdef'`s scattered throughout the code. The `'gawkmisc.c'` in the main source directory includes the appropriate `'gawkmisc.???'` file from each subdirectory. Be sure to update it as well.

Each port's `'gawkmisc.???'` file has a suffix reminiscent of the machine or operating system for the port—for example, `'pc/gawkmisc.pc'` and `'vms/gawkmisc.vms'`. The use of separate suffixes, instead of plain `'gawkmisc.c'`, makes it possible to move files from a port's subdirectory into the main subdirectory, without accidentally destroying the real `'gawkmisc.c'` file. (Currently, this is only an issue for the PC operating system ports.)

7. Supply a `'Makefile'` as well as any other C source and header files that are necessary for your operating system. All your code should be in a separate subdirectory, with a name that is the same as, or reminiscent of, either your operating system or the computer system. If possible, try to structure things so that it is not necessary to move files out of the subdirectory into the main source directory. If that is not possible, then be sure to avoid using names for your files that duplicate the names of files in the main source directory.
8. Update the documentation. Please write a section (or sections) for this book describing the installation and compilation steps needed to compile and/or install `gawk` for your system.

Following these steps makes it much easier to integrate your changes into `gawk` and have them coexist happily with other operating systems' code that is already there.

In the code that you supply and maintain, feel free to use a coding style and brace layout that suits your taste.

### C.3 Adding New Built-in Functions to `gawk`

*Danger Will Robinson! Danger!!*

*Warning! Warning!*

The Robot

It is possible to add new built-in functions to `gawk` using dynamically loaded libraries. This facility is available on systems (such as GNU/Linux) that support the C `dlopen()`

and `dlsym()` functions. This section describes how to write and use dynamically loaded extensions for `gawk`. Experience with programming in C or C++ is necessary when reading this section.

**CAUTION:** The facilities described in this section are very much subject to change in a future `gawk` release. Be aware that you may have to re-do everything, at some future time.

If you have written your own dynamic extensions, be sure to recompile them for each new `gawk` release. There is no guarantee of binary compatibility between different releases, nor will there ever be such a guarantee.

**NOTE:** When ‘`--sandbox`’ is specified, extensions are disabled (see [Section 2.2 \[Command-Line Options\]](#), page 25).

### C.3.1 A Minimal Introduction to `gawk` Internals

The truth is that `gawk` was not designed for simple extensibility. The facilities for adding functions using shared libraries work, but are something of a “bag on the side.” Thus, this tour is brief and simplistic; would-be `gawk` hackers are encouraged to spend some time reading the source code before trying to write extensions based on the material presented here. Of particular note are the files ‘`awk.h`’, ‘`builtin.c`’, and ‘`eval.c`’. Reading ‘`awkgram.y`’ in order to see how the parse tree is built would also be of use.

With the disclaimers out of the way, the following types, structure members, functions, and macros are declared in ‘`awk.h`’ and are of use when writing extensions. The next section shows how they are used:

**AWKNUM**     An AWKNUM is the internal type of `awk` floating-point numbers. Typically, it is a C `double`.

**NODE**        Just about everything is done using objects of type `NODE`. These contain both strings and numbers, as well as variables and arrays.

**AWKNUM force\_number(NODE \*n)**  
               This macro forces a value to be numeric. It returns the actual numeric value contained in the node. It may end up calling an internal `gawk` function.

**void force\_string(NODE \*n)**  
               This macro guarantees that a `NODE`’s string value is current. It may end up calling an internal `gawk` function. It also guarantees that the string is zero-terminated.

**void force\_wstring(NODE \*n)**  
               Similarly, this macro guarantees that a `NODE`’s wide-string value is current. It may end up calling an internal `gawk` function. It also guarantees that the wide string is zero-terminated.

**size\_t get\_curfunc\_arg\_count(void)**  
               This function returns the actual number of parameters passed to the current function. Inside the code of an extension this can be used to determine the maximum index which is safe to use with `get_actual_argument`. If this value is greater than `nargs`, the function was called incorrectly from the `awk` program.

**nargs** Inside an extension function, this is the maximum number of expected parameters, as set by the `make_builtin()` function.

**n->stptr**

**n->stlen** The data and length of a NODE's string value, respectively. The string is *not* guaranteed to be zero-terminated. If you need to pass the string value to a C library function, save the value in `n->stptr[n->stlen]`, assign `'\0'` to it, call the routine, and then restore the value.

**n->wstptr**

**n->wstlen**

The data and length of a NODE's wide-string value, respectively. Use `force_wstring()` to make sure these values are current.

**n->type** The type of the NODE. This is a C `enum`. Values should be one of `Node_var`, `Node_var_new`, or `Node_var_array` for function parameters.

**n->vname** The "variable name" of a node. This is not of much use inside externally written extensions.

**void assoc\_clear(NODE \*n)**

Clears the associative array pointed to by `n`. Make sure that `'n->type == Node_var_array'` first.

**NODE \*\*assoc\_lookup(NODE \*symbol, NODE \*subs, int reference)**

Finds, and installs if necessary, array elements. `symbol` is the array, `subs` is the subscript. This is usually a value created with `make_string()` (see below). `reference` should be `TRUE` if it is an error to use the value before it is created. Typically, `FALSE` is the correct value to use from extension functions.

**NODE \*make\_string(char \*s, size\_t len)**

Take a C string and turn it into a pointer to a NODE that can be stored appropriately. This is permanent storage; understanding of `gawk` memory management is helpful.

**NODE \*make\_number(AWKNUM val)**

Take an `AWKNUM` and turn it into a pointer to a NODE that can be stored appropriately. This is permanent storage; understanding of `gawk` memory management is helpful.

**NODE \*dupnode(NODE \*n)**

Duplicate a node. In most cases, this increments an internal reference count instead of actually duplicating the entire NODE; understanding of `gawk` memory management is helpful.

**void unref(NODE \*n)**

This macro releases the memory associated with a NODE allocated with `make_string()` or `make_number()`. Understanding of `gawk` memory management is helpful.

**void make\_builtin(const char \*name, NODE \*(\*func)(NODE \*), int count)**

Register a C function pointed to by `func` as new built-in function `name`. `name` is a regular C string. `count` is the maximum number of arguments that the function takes. The function should be written in the following manner:

```
/* do_xxx --- do xxx function for gawk */
```

```

NODE *
do_xxx(int nargs)
{
    ...
}

```

```
NODE *get_argument(int i)
```

This function is called from within a C extension function to get the *i*-th argument from the function call. The first argument is argument zero.

```
NODE *get_actual_argument(int i,
                          int optional, int wantarray);
```

This function retrieves a particular argument *i*. `wantarray` is TRUE if the argument should be an array, FALSE otherwise. If `optional` is TRUE, the argument need not have been supplied. If it wasn't, the return value is NULL. It is a fatal error if `optional` is TRUE but the argument was not provided.

```
get_scalar_argument(i, opt)
```

This is a convenience macro that calls `get_actual_argument()`.

```
get_array_argument(i, opt)
```

This is a convenience macro that calls `get_actual_argument()`.

```
void update_ERRNO(void)
```

This function is called from within a C extension function to set the value of `gawk`'s `ERRNO` variable, based on the current value of the C `errno` global variable. It is provided as a convenience.

```
void update_ERRNO_saved(int errno_saved)
```

This function is called from within a C extension function to set the value of `gawk`'s `ERRNO` variable, based on the error value provided as the argument. It is provided as a convenience.

```
void register_deferred_variable(const char *name, NODE *(*load_func)(void))
```

This function is called to register a function to be called when a reference to an undefined variable with the given name is encountered. The callback function will never be called if the variable exists already, so, unless the calling code is running at program startup, it should first check whether a variable of the given name already exists. The argument function must return a pointer to a `NODE` containing the newly created variable. This function is used to implement the builtin `ENVIRON` and `PROCINFO` arrays, so you can refer to them for examples.

```
void register_open_hook(void *(*open_func)(IOBUF *))
```

This function is called to register a function to be called whenever a new data file is opened, leading to the creation of an `IOBUF` structure in `iop_alloc()`. After creating the new `IOBUF`, `iop_alloc()` will call (in reverse order of registration, so the last function registered is called first) each open hook until one returns non-NULL. If any hook returns a non-NULL value, that value is assigned to the `IOBUF`'s `opaque` field (which will presumably point to a structure containing

additional state associated with the input processing), and no further open hooks are called.

The function called will most likely want to set the `IOBUF`'s `get_record` method to indicate that future input records should be retrieved by calling that method instead of using the standard `gawk` input processing.

And the function will also probably want to set the `IOBUF`'s `close_func` method to be called when the file is closed to clean up any state associated with the input.

Finally, hook functions should be prepared to receive an `IOBUF` structure where the `fd` field is set to `INVALID_HANDLE`, meaning that `gawk` was not able to open the file itself. In this case, the hook function must be able to successfully open the file and place a valid file descriptor there.

Currently, for example, the hook function facility is used to implement the XML parser shared library extension. For more info, please look in `'awk.h'` and in `'io.c'`.

An argument that is supposed to be an array needs to be handled with some extra code, in case the array being passed in is actually from a function parameter.

The following boilerplate code shows how to do this:

```

NODE *the_arg;

/* assume need 3rd arg, 0-based */
the_arg = get_array_argument(2, FALSE);

```

Again, you should spend time studying the `gawk` internals; don't just blindly copy this code.

### C.3.2 Extension Licensing

Every dynamic extension should define the global symbol `plugin_is_GPL_compatible` to assert that it has been licensed under a GPL-compatible license. If this symbol does not exist, `gawk` will emit a fatal error and exit.

The declared type of the symbol should be `int`. It does not need to be in any allocated section, though. The code merely asserts that the symbol exists in the global scope. Something like this is enough:

```
int plugin_is_GPL_compatible;
```

### C.3.3 Example: Directory and File Operation Built-ins

Two useful functions that are not in `awk` are `chdir()` (so that an `awk` program can change its directory) and `stat()` (so that an `awk` program can gather information about a file). This section implements these functions for `gawk` in an external extension library.

#### C.3.3.1 Using `chdir()` and `stat()`

This section shows how to use the new functions at the `awk` level once they've been integrated into the running `gawk` interpreter. Using `chdir()` is very straightforward. It takes one argument, the new directory to change to:

```

...
newdir = "/home/arnold/funstuff"
ret = chdir(newdir)
if (ret < 0) {
    printf("could not change to %s: %s\n",
           newdir, ERRNO) > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}
...

```

The return value is negative if the `chdir` failed, and `ERRNO` (see [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126) is set to a string indicating the error.

Using `stat()` is a bit more complicated. The C `stat()` function fills in a structure that has a fair amount of information. The right way to model this in `awk` is to fill in an associative array with the appropriate information:

```

file = "/home/arnold/.profile"
fdata[1] = "x"    # force 'fdata' to be an array
ret = stat(file, fdata)
if (ret < 0) {
    printf("could not stat %s: %s\n",
           file, ERRNO) > "/dev/stderr"
    exit 1
}
printf("size of %s is %d bytes\n", file, fdata["size"])

```

The `stat()` function always clears the data array, even if the `stat()` fails. It fills in the following elements:

"name"	The name of the file that was <code>stat()</code> 'ed.
"dev"	
"ino"	The file's device and inode numbers, respectively.
"mode"	The file's mode, as a numeric value. This includes both the file's type and its permissions.
"nlink"	The number of hard links (directory entries) the file has.
"uid"	
"gid"	The numeric user and group ID numbers of the file's owner.
"size"	The size in bytes of the file.
"blocks"	The number of disk blocks the file actually occupies. This may not be a function of the file's size if the file has holes.
"atime"	
"mtime"	
"ctime"	The file's last access, modification, and inode update times, respectively. These are numeric timestamps, suitable for formatting with <code>strftime()</code> (see <a href="#">Section 9.1 [Built-in Functions]</a> , page 147).
"pmode"	The file's "printable mode." This is a string representation of the file's type and permissions, such as what is produced by <code>'ls -l'</code> —for example, <code>"drwxr-xr-x"</code> .

"type" A printable string representation of the file's type. The value is one of the following:

- "blockdev"
  - "chardev" The file is a block or character device ("special file").
- "directory" The file is a directory.
- "fifo" The file is a named-pipe (also known as a FIFO).
- "file" The file is just a regular file.
- "socket" The file is an AF\_UNIX ("Unix domain") socket in the filesystem.
- "symlink" The file is a symbolic link.

Several additional elements may be present depending upon the operating system and the type of the file. You can test for them in your `awk` program by using the `in` operator (see [Section 8.1.2 \[Referring to an Array Element\]](#), page 136):

"blksize" The preferred block size for I/O to the file. This field is not present on all POSIX-like systems in the C `stat` structure.

"linkval" If the file is a symbolic link, this element is the name of the file the link points to (i.e., the value of the link).

"rdev"  
"major"  
"minor" If the file is a block or character device file, then these values represent the numeric device number and the major and minor components of that number, respectively.

### C.3.3.2 C Code for `chdir()` and `stat()`

Here is the C code for these extensions. They were written for GNU/Linux. The code needs some more work for complete portability to other POSIX-compliant systems:<sup>1</sup>

```
#include "awk.h"

#include <sys/sysmacros.h>

int plugin_is_GPL_compatible;

/* do_chdir --- provide dynamically loaded chdir() builtin for gawk */

static NODE *
```

---

<sup>1</sup> This version is edited slightly for presentation. See `'extension/filefuncs.c'` in the `gawk` distribution for the complete version.

```

do_chdir(int nargs)
{
    NODE *newdir;
    int ret = -1;

    if (do_lint && get_curfunc_arg_count() != 1)
        lintwarn("chdir: called with incorrect number of arguments");

    newdir = get_scalar_argument(0, FALSE);

```

The file includes the "awk.h" header file for definitions for the gawk internals. It includes <sys/sysmacros.h> for access to the major() and minor() macros.

By convention, for an awk function foo, the function that implements it is called 'do\_foo'. The function should take a 'int' argument, usually called nargs, that represents the number of defined arguments for the function. The newdir variable represents the new directory to change to, retrieved with get\_scalar\_argument(). Note that the first argument is numbered zero.

This code actually accomplishes the chdir(). It first forces the argument to be a string and passes the string value to the chdir() system call. If the chdir() fails, ERRNO is updated.

```

    (void) force_string(newdir);
    ret = chdir(newdir->stpstr);
    if (ret < 0)
        update_ERRNO();

```

Finally, the function returns the return value to the awk level:

```

    return make_number((AWKNUM) ret);
}

```

The stat() built-in is more involved. First comes a function that turns a numeric mode into a printable representation (e.g., 644 becomes '-rw-r--r--'). This is omitted here for brevity:

```

/* format_mode --- turn a stat mode field into something readable */

static char *
format_mode(unsigned long fmode)
{
    ...
}

```

Next comes the do\_stat() function. It starts with variable declarations and argument checking:

```

/* do_stat --- provide a stat() function for gawk */

static NODE *
do_stat(int nargs)
{
    NODE *file, *array, *tmp;
    struct stat sbuf;

```

```

int ret;
NODE **aptr;
char *pmode;    /* printable mode */
char *type = "unknown";

if (do_lint && get_curfunc_arg_count() > 2)
    lintwarn("stat: called with too many arguments");

```

Then comes the actual work. First, the function gets the arguments. Then, it always clears the array. The code use `lstat()` (instead of `stat()`) to get the file information, in case the file is a symbolic link. If there's an error, it sets `ERRNO` and returns:

```

/* file is first arg, array to hold results is second */
file = get_scalar_argument(0, FALSE);
array = get_array_argument(1, FALSE);

/* empty out the array */
assoc_clear(array);

/* lstat the file, if error, set ERRNO and return */
(void) force_string(file);
ret = lstat(file->stptr, & sbuf);
if (ret < 0) {
    update_ERRNO();
    return make_number((AWKNUM) ret);
}

```

Now comes the tedious part: filling in the array. Only a few of the calls are shown here, since they all follow the same pattern:

```

/* fill in the array */
aptr = assoc_lookup(array, tmp = make_string("name", 4), FALSE);
*aptr = dupnode(file);
unref(tmp);

aptr = assoc_lookup(array, tmp = make_string("mode", 4), FALSE);
*aptr = make_number((AWKNUM) sbuf.st_mode);
unref(tmp);

aptr = assoc_lookup(array, tmp = make_string("pmode", 5), FALSE);
pmode = format_mode(sbuf.st_mode);
*aptr = make_string(pmode, strlen(pmode));
unref(tmp);

```

When done, return the `lstat()` return value:

```

    return make_number((AWKNUM) ret);
}

```

Finally, it's necessary to provide the "glue" that loads the new function(s) into `gawk`. By convention, each library has a routine named `dllload()` that does the job:

```

/* dlload --- load new builtins in this library */

NODE *
dlload(NODE *tree, void *dl)
{
    make_builtin("chdir", do_chdir, 1);
    make_builtin("stat", do_stat, 2);
    return make_number((AWKNUM) 0);
}

```

And that's it! As an exercise, consider adding functions to implement system calls such as `chown()`, `chmod()`, and `umask()`.

### C.3.3.3 Integrating the Extensions

Now that the code is written, it must be possible to add it at runtime to the running `gawk` interpreter. First, the code must be compiled. Assuming that the functions are in a file named `filefuncs.c`, and `idir` is the location of the `gawk` include files, the following steps create a GNU/Linux shared library:

```

$ gcc -fPIC -shared -DHAVE_CONFIG_H -c -O -g -Iidir filefuncs.c
$ ld -o filefuncs.so -shared filefuncs.o

```

Once the library exists, it is loaded by calling the `extension()` built-in function. This function takes two arguments: the name of the library to load and the name of a function to call when the library is first loaded. This function adds the new functions to `gawk`. It returns the value returned by the initialization function within the shared library:

```

# file testff.awk
BEGIN {
    extension("./filefuncs.so", "dlload")

    chdir(".") # no-op

    data[1] = 1 # force 'data' to be an array
    print "Info for testff.awk"
    ret = stat("testff.awk", data)
    print "ret =", ret
    for (i in data)
        printf "data[\"%s\"] = %s\n", i, data[i]
    print "testff.awk modified:",
        strftime("%m %d %y %H:%M:%S", data["mtime"])

    print "\nInfo for JUNK"
    ret = stat("JUNK", data)
    print "ret =", ret
    for (i in data)
        printf "data[\"%s\"] = %s\n", i, data[i]
    print "JUNK modified:", strftime("%m %d %y %H:%M:%S", data["mtime"])
}

```

Here are the results of running the program:

```

$ gawk -f testff.awk
+ Info for testff.awk
+ ret = 0
+ data["size"] = 607
+ data["ino"] = 14945891
+ data["name"] = testff.awk
+ data["pmode"] = -rw-rw-r--
+ data["nlink"] = 1
+ data["atime"] = 1293993369
+ data["mtime"] = 1288520752
+ data["mode"] = 33204
+ data["blksize"] = 4096
+ data["dev"] = 2054
+ data["type"] = file
+ data["gid"] = 500
+ data["uid"] = 500
+ data["blocks"] = 8
+ data["ctime"] = 1290113572
+ testff.awk modified: 10 31 10 12:25:52
+
+ Info for JUNK
+ ret = -1
+ JUNK modified: 01 01 70 02:00:00

```

## C.4 Probable Future Extensions

*AWK is a language similar to PERL, only considerably more elegant.*

Arnold Robbins

*Hey!*

Larry Wall

This section briefly lists extensions and possible improvements that indicate the directions we are currently considering for `gawk`. The file ‘FUTURES’ in the `gawk` distribution lists these extensions as well.

Following is a list of probable future changes visible at the `awk` language level:

### Loadable module interface

It is not clear that the `awk`-level interface to the modules facility is as good as it should be. The interface needs to be redesigned, particularly taking namespace issues into account, as well as possibly including issues such as library search path order and versioning.

### RECLEN variable for fixed-length records

Along with `FIELDWIDTHS`, this would speed up the processing of fixed-length records. `PROCINFO["RS"]` would be `"RS"` or `"RECLEN"`, depending upon which kind of record processing is in effect.

**Databases** It may be possible to map a GDBM/NDBM/SDBM file into an `awk` array.

#### More `lint` warnings

There are more things that could be checked for portability.

Following is a list of probable improvements that will make `gawk`'s source code easier to work with:

#### Loadable module mechanics

The current extension mechanism works (see [Section C.3 \[Adding New Built-in Functions to `gawk`\]](#), page 328), but is rather primitive. It requires a fair amount of manual work to create and integrate a loadable module. Nor is the current mechanism as portable as might be desired. The GNU `libtool` package provides a number of features that would make using loadable modules much easier. `gawk` should be changed to use `libtool`.

#### Loadable module internals

The API to its internals that `gawk` “exports” should be revised. Too many things are needlessly exposed. A new API should be designed and implemented to make module writing easier.

#### Better array subscript management

`gawk`'s management of array subscript storage could use revamping, so that using the same value to index multiple arrays only stores one copy of the index value.

Finally, the programs in the test suite could use documenting in this book.

See [Section C.2 \[Making Additions to `gawk`\]](#), page 325, if you are interested in tackling any of these projects.

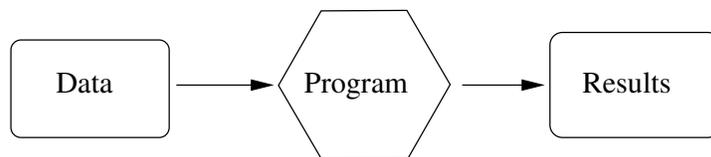


## Appendix D Basic Programming Concepts

This appendix attempts to define some of the basic concepts and terms that are used throughout the rest of this book. As this book is specifically about `awk`, and not about computer programming in general, the coverage here is by necessity fairly cursory and simplistic. (If you need more background, there are many other introductory texts that you should refer to instead.)

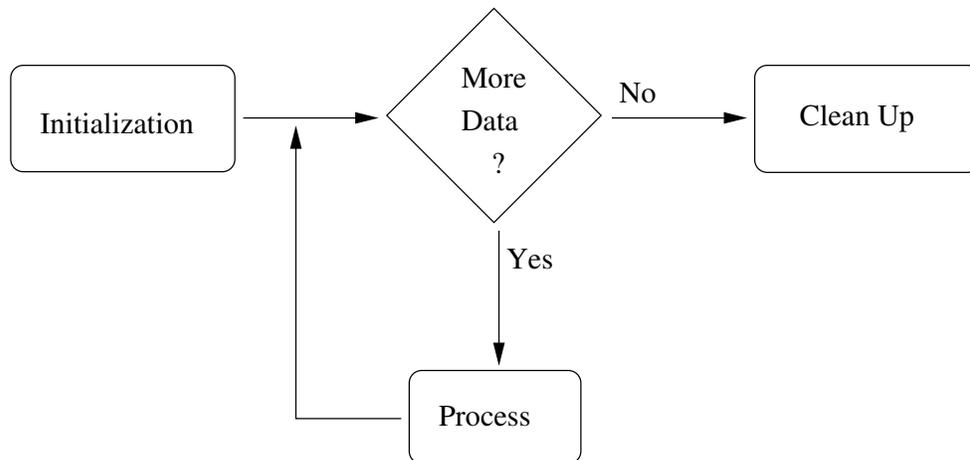
### D.1 What a Program Does

At the most basic level, the job of a program is to process some input data and produce results.



The “program” in the figure can be either a compiled program<sup>1</sup> (such as `ls`), or it may be *interpreted*. In the latter case, a machine-executable program such as `awk` reads your program, and then uses the instructions in your program to process the data.

When you write a program, it usually consists of the following, very basic set of steps:



#### Initialization

These are the things you do before actually starting to process data, such as checking arguments, initializing any data you need to work with, and so on. This step corresponds to `awk`’s `BEGIN` rule (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114).

If you were baking a cake, this might consist of laying out all the mixing bowls and the baking pan, and making sure you have all the ingredients that you need.

<sup>1</sup> Compiled programs are typically written in lower-level languages such as C, C++, or Ada, and then translated, or *compiled*, into a form that the computer can execute directly.

**Processing** This is where the actual work is done. Your program reads data, one logical chunk at a time, and processes it as appropriate.

In most programming languages, you have to manually manage the reading of data, checking to see if there is more each time you read a chunk. `awk`'s pattern-action paradigm (see [Chapter 1 \[Getting Started with `awk`\]](#), page 11) handles the mechanics of this for you.

In baking a cake, the processing corresponds to the actual labor: breaking eggs, mixing the flour, water, and other ingredients, and then putting the cake into the oven.

**Clean Up** Once you've processed all the data, you may have things you need to do before exiting. This step corresponds to `awk`'s END rule (see [Section 7.1.4 \[The BEGIN and END Special Patterns\]](#), page 114).

After the cake comes out of the oven, you still have to wrap it in plastic wrap to keep anyone from tasting it, as well as wash the mixing bowls and utensils.

An *algorithm* is a detailed set of instructions necessary to accomplish a task, or process data. It is much the same as a recipe for baking a cake. Programs implement algorithms. Often, it is up to you to design the algorithm and implement it, simultaneously.

The “logical chunks” we talked about previously are called *records*, similar to the records a company keeps on employees, a school keeps for students, or a doctor keeps for patients. Each record has many component parts, such as first and last names, date of birth, address, and so on. The component parts are referred to as the *fields* of the record.

The act of reading data is termed *input*, and that of generating results, not too surprisingly, is termed *output*. They are often referred to together as “input/output,” and even more often, as “I/O” for short. (You will also see “input” and “output” used as verbs.)

`awk` manages the reading of data for you, as well as the breaking it up into records and fields. Your program's job is to tell `awk` what to do with the data. You do this by describing *patterns* in the data to look for, and *actions* to execute when those patterns are seen. This *data-driven* nature of `awk` programs usually makes them both easier to write and easier to read.

## D.2 Data Values in a Computer

In a program, you keep track of information and values in things called *variables*. A variable is just a name for a given value, such as `first_name`, `last_name`, `address`, and so on. `awk` has several predefined variables, and it has special names to refer to the current input record and the fields of the record. You may also group multiple associated values under one name, as an array.

Data, particularly in `awk`, consists of either numeric values, such as 42 or 3.1415927, or string values. String values are essentially anything that's not a number, such as a name. Strings are sometimes referred to as *character data*, since they store the individual characters that comprise them. Individual variables, as well as numeric and string variables, are referred to as *scalar* values. Groups of values, such as arrays, are not scalars.

Within computers, there are two kinds of numeric values: *integers* and *floating-point*. In school, integer values were referred to as “whole” numbers—that is, numbers without any fractional part, such as 1, 42, or  $-17$ . The advantage to integer numbers is that they

represent values exactly. The disadvantage is that their range is limited. On most systems, this range is  $-2,147,483,648$  to  $2,147,483,647$ . However, many systems now support a range from  $-9,223,372,036,854,775,808$  to  $9,223,372,036,854,775,807$ .

Integer values come in two flavors: *signed* and *unsigned*. Signed values may be negative or positive, with the range of values just described. Unsigned values are always positive. On most systems, the range is from 0 to  $4,294,967,295$ . However, many systems now support a range from 0 to  $18,446,744,073,709,551,615$ .

Floating-point numbers represent what are called “real” numbers; i.e., those that do have a fractional part, such as  $3.1415927$ . The advantage to floating-point numbers is that they can represent a much larger range of values. The disadvantage is that there are numbers that they cannot represent exactly. `awk` uses *double precision* floating-point numbers, which can hold more digits than *single precision* floating-point numbers. Floating-point issues are discussed more fully in [Section D.3 \[Floating-Point Number Caveats\]](#), page 343.

At the very lowest level, computers store values as groups of binary digits, or *bits*. Modern computers group bits into groups of eight, called *bytes*. Advanced applications sometimes have to manipulate bits directly, and `gawk` provides functions for doing so.

While you are probably used to the idea of a number without a value (i.e., zero), it takes a bit more getting used to the idea of zero-length character data. Nevertheless, such a thing exists. It is called the *null string*. The null string is character data that has no value. In other words, it is empty. It is written in `awk` programs like this: `""`.

Humans are used to working in decimal; i.e., base 10. In base 10, numbers go from 0 to 9, and then “roll over” into the next column. (Remember grade school? 42 is 4 times 10 plus 2.)

There are other number bases though. Computers commonly use base 2 or *binary*, base 8 or *octal*, and base 16 or *hexadecimal*. In binary, each column represents two times the value in the column to its right. Each column may contain either a 0 or a 1. Thus, binary 1010 represents 1 times 8, plus 0 times 4, plus 1 times 2, plus 0 times 1, or decimal 10. Octal and hexadecimal are discussed more in [Section 6.1.1.2 \[Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers\]](#), page 89.

Programs are written in programming languages. Hundreds, if not thousands, of programming languages exist. One of the most popular is the C programming language. The C language had a very strong influence on the design of the `awk` language.

There have been several versions of C. The first is often referred to as “K&R” C, after the initials of Brian Kernighan and Dennis Ritchie, the authors of the first book on C. (Dennis Ritchie created the language, and Brian Kernighan was one of the creators of `awk`.)

In the mid-1980s, an effort began to produce an international standard for C. This work culminated in 1989, with the production of the ANSI standard for C. This standard became an ISO standard in 1990. In 1999, a revised ISO C standard was approved and released. Where it makes sense, POSIX `awk` is compatible with 1999 ISO C.

### D.3 Floating-Point Number Caveats

As mentioned earlier, floating-point numbers represent what are called “real” numbers, i.e., those that have a fractional part. `awk` uses double precision floating-point numbers to represent all numeric values. This section describes some of the issues involved in using floating-point numbers.

There is a very nice [paper on floating-point arithmetic](#) by David Goldberg, “What Every Computer Scientist Should Know About Floating-point Arithmetic,” *ACM Computing Surveys* **23**, 1 (1991-03), 5-48. This is worth reading if you are interested in the details, but it does require a background in computer science.

### D.3.1 The String Value Can Lie

Internally, `awk` keeps both the numeric value (double precision floating-point) and the string value for a variable. Separately, `awk` keeps track of what type the variable has (see [Section 6.3.2 \[Variable Typing and Comparison Expressions\]](#), page 102), which plays a role in how variables are used in comparisons.

It is important to note that the string value for a number may not reflect the full value (all the digits) that the numeric value actually contains. The following program (`values.awk`) illustrates this:

```
{
  sum = $1 + $2
  # see it for what it is
  printf("sum = %.12g\n", sum)
  # use CONVFMT
  a = "<" sum ">"
  print "a =", a
  # use OFMT
  print "sum =", sum
}
```

This program shows the full value of the sum of `$1` and `$2` using `printf`, and then prints the string values obtained from both automatic conversion (via `CONVFMT`) and from printing (via `OFMT`).

Here is what happens when the program is run:

```
$ echo 3.654321 1.2345678 | awk -f values.awk
-| sum = 4.8888888
-| a = <4.88889>
-| sum = 4.88889
```

This makes it clear that the full numeric value is different from what the default string representations show.

`CONVFMT`'s default value is `%.6g`, which yields a value with at least six significant digits. For some applications, you might want to change it to specify more precision. On most modern machines, most of the time, 17 digits is enough to capture a floating-point number's value exactly.<sup>2</sup>

### D.3.2 Floating Point Numbers Are Not Abstract Numbers

Unlike numbers in the abstract sense (such as what you studied in high school or college math), numbers stored in computers are limited in certain ways. They cannot represent an infinite number of digits, nor can they always represent things exactly. In particular, floating-point numbers cannot always represent values exactly. Here is an example:

---

<sup>2</sup> Pathological cases can require up to 752 digits (!), but we doubt that you need to worry about this.

```

$ awk '{ printf("%010d\n", $1 * 100) }'
515.79
  - 0000051579
515.80
  - 0000051579
515.81
  - 0000051580
515.82
  - 0000051582
Ctrl-d

```

This shows that some values can be represented exactly, whereas others are only approximated. This is not a “bug” in `awk`, but simply an artifact of how computers represent numbers.

Another peculiarity of floating-point numbers on modern systems is that they often have more than one representation for the number zero! In particular, it is possible to represent “minus zero” as well as regular, or “positive” zero.

This example shows that negative and positive zero are distinct values when stored internally, but that they are in fact equal to each other, as well as to “regular” zero:

```

$ gawk 'BEGIN { mz = -0 ; pz = 0
> printf "-0 = %g, +0 = %g, (-0 == +0) -> %d\n", mz, pz, mz == pz
> printf "mz == 0 -> %d, pz == 0 -> %d\n", mz == 0, pz == 0
> }'
  - -0 = -0, +0 = 0, (-0 == +0) -> 1
  - mz == 0 -> 1, pz == 0 -> 1

```

It helps to keep this in mind should you process numeric data that contains negative zero values; the fact that the zero is negative is noted and can affect comparisons.

### D.3.3 Standards Versus Existing Practice

Historically, `awk` has converted any non-numeric looking string to the numeric value zero, when required. Furthermore, the original definition of the language and the original POSIX standards specified that `awk` only understands decimal numbers (base 10), and not octal (base 8) or hexadecimal numbers (base 16).

Changes in the language of the 2001 and 2004 POSIX standard can be interpreted to imply that `awk` should support additional features. These features are:

- Interpretation of floating point data values specified in hexadecimal notation (`'0xDEADBEEF'`). (Note: data values, *not* source code constants.)
- Support for the special IEEE 754 floating point values “Not A Number” (NaN), positive Infinity (“`inf`”) and negative Infinity (“`-inf`”). In particular, the format for these values is as specified by the ISO 1999 C standard, which ignores case and can allow machine-dependent additional characters after the `'nan'` and allow either `'inf'` or `'infinity'`.

The first problem is that both of these are clear changes to historical practice:

- The `gawk` maintainer feels that supporting hexadecimal floating point values, in particular, is ugly, and was never intended by the original designers to be part of the language.

- Allowing completely alphabetic strings to have valid numeric values is also a very severe departure from historical practice.

The second problem is that the `gawk` maintainer feels that this interpretation of the standard, which requires a certain amount of “language lawyering” to arrive at in the first place, was not even intended by the standard developers. In other words, “we see how you got where you are, but we don’t think that that’s where you want to be.”

The 2008 POSIX standard added explicit wording to allow, but not require, that `awk` support hexadecimal floating point values and special values for “Not A Number” and infinity.

Although the `gawk` maintainer continues to feel that providing those features is inadvisable, nevertheless, on systems that support IEEE floating point, it seems reasonable to provide *some* way to support NaN and Infinity values. The solution implemented in `gawk` is as follows:

- With the ‘`--posix`’ command-line option, `gawk` becomes “hands off.” String values are passed directly to the system library’s `strtod()` function, and if it successfully returns a numeric value, that is what’s used.<sup>3</sup> By definition, the results are not portable across different systems. They are also a little surprising:

```
$ echo nanny | gawk --posix '{ print $1 + 0 }'
+ nan
$ echo 0xDeadBeef | gawk --posix '{ print $1 + 0 }'
+ 3735928559
```

- Without ‘`--posix`’, `gawk` interprets the four strings ‘`+inf`’, ‘`-inf`’, ‘`+nan`’, and ‘`-nan`’ specially, producing the corresponding special numeric values. The leading sign acts a signal to `gawk` (and the user) that the value is really numeric. Hexadecimal floating point is not supported (unless you also use ‘`--non-decimal-data`’, which is *not* recommended). For example:

```
$ echo nanny | gawk '{ print $1 + 0 }'
+ 0
$ echo +nan | gawk '{ print $1 + 0 }'
+ nan
$ echo 0xDeadBeef | gawk '{ print $1 + 0 }'
+ 0
```

`gawk` does ignore case in the four special values. Thus ‘`+nan`’ and ‘`+NaN`’ are the same.

---

<sup>3</sup> You asked for it, you got it.

## Glossary

- Action** A series of `awk` statements attached to a rule. If the rule's pattern matches an input record, `awk` executes the rule's action. Actions are always enclosed in curly braces. (See [Section 7.3 \[Actions\]](#), page 117.)
- Amazing `awk` Assembler**  
Henry Spencer at the University of Toronto wrote a retargetable assembler completely as `sed` and `awk` scripts. It is thousands of lines long, including machine descriptions for several eight-bit microcomputers. It is a good example of a program that would have been better written in another language. You can get it from <http://awk.info/?awk100/aaa>.
- Ada** A programming language originally defined by the U.S. Department of Defense for embedded programming. It was designed to enforce good Software Engineering practices.
- Amazingly Workable Formatter (`awf`)**  
Henry Spencer at the University of Toronto wrote a formatter that accepts a large subset of the '`nroff -ms`' and '`nroff -man`' formatting commands, using `awk` and `sh`. It is available from <http://awk.info/?tools/awf>.
- Anchor** The regexp metacharacters '^' and '\$', which force the match to the beginning or end of the string, respectively.
- ANSI** The American National Standards Institute. This organization produces many standards, among them the standards for the C and C++ programming languages. These standards often become international standards as well. See also "ISO."
- Array** A grouping of multiple values under the same name. Most languages just provide sequential arrays. `awk` provides associative arrays.
- Assertion** A statement in a program that a condition is true at this point in the program. Useful for reasoning about how a program is supposed to behave.
- Assignment**  
An `awk` expression that changes the value of some `awk` variable or data object. An object that you can assign to is called an *lvalue*. The assigned values are called *rvalues*. See [Section 6.2.3 \[Assignment Expressions\]](#), page 98.
- Associative Array**  
Arrays in which the indices may be numbers or strings, not just sequential integers in a fixed range.
- `awk` Language**  
The language in which `awk` programs are written.
- `awk` Program**  
An `awk` program consists of a series of *patterns* and *actions*, collectively known as *rules*. For each input record given to the program, the program's rules are all processed in turn. `awk` programs may also contain function definitions.
- `awk` Script** Another name for an `awk` program.

- Bash** The GNU version of the standard shell (the **B**ourne-**A**gain **S**hell). See also “Bourne Shell.”
- BBS** See “Bulletin Board System.”
- Bit** Short for “Binary Digit.” All values in computer memory ultimately reduce to binary digits: values that are either zero or one. Groups of bits may be interpreted differently—as integers, floating-point numbers, character data, addresses of other memory objects, or other data. **awk** lets you work with floating-point numbers and strings. **gawk** lets you manipulate bit values with the built-in functions described in [Section 9.1.6 \[Bit-Manipulation Functions\]](#), page 167.
- Computers are often defined by how many bits they use to represent integer values. Typical systems are 32-bit systems, but 64-bit systems are becoming increasingly popular, and 16-bit systems have essentially disappeared.
- Boolean Expression**  
Named after the English mathematician Boole. See also “Logical Expression.”
- Bourne Shell**  
The standard shell (`/bin/sh`) on Unix and Unix-like systems, originally written by Steven R. Bourne. Many shells (**Bash**, **ksh**, **pdksh**, **zsh**) are generally upwardly compatible with the Bourne shell.
- Built-in Function**  
The **awk** language provides built-in functions that perform various numerical, I/O-related, and string computations. Examples are `sqrt()` (for the square root of a number) and `substr()` (for a substring of a string). **gawk** provides functions for timestamp management, bit manipulation, array sorting, type checking, and runtime string translation. (See [Section 9.1 \[Built-in Functions\]](#), page 147.)
- Built-in Variable**  
**ARGC**, **ARGV**, **CONVFMT**, **ENVIRON**, **FILENAME**, **FNR**, **FS**, **NF**, **NR**, **OFMT**, **OFS**, **ORS**, **RLENGTH**, **RSTART**, **RS**, and **SUBSEP** are the variables that have special meaning to **awk**. In addition, **ARGIND**, **BINMODE**, **ERRNO**, **FIELDWIDTHS**, **FPAT**, **IGNORECASE**, **LINT**, **PROCINFO**, **RT**, and **TEXTDOMAIN** are the variables that have special meaning to **gawk**. Changing some of them affects **awk**’s running environment. (See [Section 7.5 \[Built-in Variables\]](#), page 126.)
- Braces** See “Curly Braces.”
- Bulletin Board System**  
A computer system allowing users to log in and read and/or leave messages for other users of the system, much like leaving paper notes on a bulletin board.
- C** The system programming language that most GNU software is written in. The **awk** programming language has C-like syntax, and this book points out similarities between **awk** and C when appropriate.
- In general, **gawk** attempts to be as similar to the 1990 version of ISO C as makes sense.
- C++** A popular object-oriented programming language derived from C.

## Character Set

The set of numeric codes used by a computer system to represent the characters (letters, numbers, punctuation, etc.) of a particular country or place. The most common character set in use today is ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange). Many European countries use an extension of ASCII known as ISO-8859-1 (ISO Latin-1). The **Unicode character set** is becoming increasingly popular and standard, and is particularly widely used on GNU/Linux systems.

**CHEM** A preprocessor for `pic` that reads descriptions of molecules and produces `pic` input for drawing them. It was written in `awk` by Brian Kernighan and Jon Bentley, and is available from <http://netlib.sandia.gov/netlib/typesetting/chem.gz>.

**Coprocess** A subordinate program with which two-way communications is possible.

**Compiler** A program that translates human-readable source code into machine-executable object code. The object code is then executed directly by the computer. See also “Interpreter.”

## Compound Statement

A series of `awk` statements, enclosed in curly braces. Compound statements may be nested. (See [Section 7.4 \[Control Statements in Actions\]](#), page 118.)

## Concatenation

Concatenating two strings means sticking them together, one after another, producing a new string. For example, the string ‘foo’ concatenated with the string ‘bar’ gives the string ‘foobar’. (See [Section 6.2.2 \[String Concatenation\]](#), page 96.)

## Conditional Expression

An expression using the ‘?:’ ternary operator, such as ‘`expr1 ? expr2 : expr3`’. The expression `expr1` is evaluated; if the result is true, the value of the whole expression is the value of `expr2`; otherwise the value is `expr3`. In either case, only one of `expr2` and `expr3` is evaluated. (See [Section 6.3.4 \[Conditional Expressions\]](#), page 107.)

## Comparison Expression

A relation that is either true or false, such as ‘`a < b`’. Comparison expressions are used in `if`, `while`, `do`, and `for` statements, and in patterns to select which input records to process. (See [Section 6.3.2 \[Variable Typing and Comparison Expressions\]](#), page 102.)

## Curly Braces

The characters ‘{’ and ‘}’. Curly braces are used in `awk` for delimiting actions, compound statements, and function bodies.

## Dark Corner

An area in the language where specifications often were (or still are) not clear, leading to unexpected or undesirable behavior. Such areas are marked in this book with the picture of a flashlight in the margin and are indexed under the heading “dark corner.”

**Data Driven**

A description of `awk` programs, where you specify the data you are interested in processing, and what to do when that data is seen.

**Data Objects**

These are numbers and strings of characters. Numbers are converted into strings and vice versa, as needed. (See [Section 6.1.4 \[Conversion of Strings and Numbers\]](#), page 93.)

**Deadlock**

The situation in which two communicating processes are each waiting for the other to perform an action.

**Debugger**

A program used to help developers remove “bugs” from (de-bug) their programs.

**Double Precision**

An internal representation of numbers that can have fractional parts. Double precision numbers keep track of more digits than do single precision numbers, but operations on them are sometimes more expensive. This is the way `awk` stores numeric values. It is the C type `double`.

**Dynamic Regular Expression**

A dynamic regular expression is a regular expression written as an ordinary expression. It could be a string constant, such as `"foo"`, but it may also be an expression whose value can vary. (See [Section 3.8 \[Using Dynamic Regexp\]](#), page 47.)

**Environment**

A collection of strings, of the form `name=val`, that each program has available to it. Users generally place values into the environment in order to provide information to various programs. Typical examples are the environment variables `HOME` and `PATH`.

**Empty String**

See “Null String.”

**Epoch**

The date used as the “beginning of time” for timestamps. Time values in most systems are represented as seconds since the epoch, with library functions available for converting these values into standard date and time formats.

The epoch on Unix and POSIX systems is 1970-01-01 00:00:00 UTC. See also “GMT” and “UTC.”

**Escape Sequences**

A special sequence of characters used for describing nonprinting characters, such as `\n` for newline or `\033` for the ASCII ESC (Escape) character. (See [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), page 38.)

**Extension**

An additional feature or change to a programming language or utility not defined by that language’s or utility’s standard. `gawk` has (too) many extensions over POSIX `awk`.

**FDL**

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- Field** When `awk` reads an input record, it splits the record into pieces separated by whitespace (or by a separator regexp that you can change by setting the built-in variable `FS`). Such pieces are called fields. If the pieces are of fixed length, you can use the built-in variable `FIELDWIDTHS` to describe their lengths. If you wish to specify the contents of fields instead of the field separator, you can use the built-in variable `FPAT` to do so. (See [Section 4.5 \[Specifying How Fields Are Separated\]](#), page 56, [Section 4.6 \[Reading Fixed-Width Data\]](#), page 61, and [Section 4.7 \[Defining Fields By Content\]](#), page 63.)
- Flag** A variable whose truth value indicates the existence or nonexistence of some condition.
- Floating-Point Number**  
Often referred to in mathematical terms as a “rational” or real number, this is just a number that can have a fractional part. See also “Double Precision” and “Single Precision.”
- Format** Format strings are used to control the appearance of output in the `strftime()` and `sprintf()` functions, and are used in the `printf` statement as well. Also, data conversions from numbers to strings are controlled by the format strings contained in the built-in variables `CONVFMT` and `OFMT`. (See [Section 5.5.2 \[Format-Control Letters\]](#), page 76.)
- Free Documentation License**  
This document describes the terms under which this book is published and may be copied. (See [\[GNU Free Documentation License\]](#), page 369.)
- Function** A specialized group of statements used to encapsulate general or program-specific tasks. `awk` has a number of built-in functions, and also allows you to define your own. (See [Chapter 9 \[Functions\]](#), page 147.)
- FSF** See “Free Software Foundation.”
- Free Software Foundation**  
A nonprofit organization dedicated to the production and distribution of freely distributable software. It was founded by Richard M. Stallman, the author of the original Emacs editor. GNU Emacs is the most widely used version of Emacs today.
- gawk** The GNU implementation of `awk`.
- General Public License**  
This document describes the terms under which `gawk` and its source code may be distributed. (See [\[GNU General Public License\]](#), page 357.)
- GMT** “Greenwich Mean Time.” This is the old term for UTC. It is the time of day used internally for Unix and POSIX systems. See also “Epoch” and “UTC.”
- GNU** “GNU’s not Unix”. An on-going project of the Free Software Foundation to create a complete, freely distributable, POSIX-compliant computing environment.

**GNU/Linux**

A variant of the GNU system using the Linux kernel, instead of the Free Software Foundation's Hurd kernel. The Linux kernel is a stable, efficient, full-featured clone of Unix that has been ported to a variety of architectures. It is most popular on PC-class systems, but runs well on a variety of other systems too. The Linux kernel source code is available under the terms of the GNU General Public License, which is perhaps its most important aspect.

**GPL** See "General Public License."

**Hexadecimal**

Base 16 notation, where the digits are 0–9 and A–F, with 'A' representing 10, 'B' representing 11, and so on, up to 'F' for 15. Hexadecimal numbers are written in C using a leading '0x', to indicate their base. Thus, 0x12 is 18 (1 times 16 plus 2). See [Section 6.1.1.2 \[Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers\]](#), page 89.

**I/O** Abbreviation for "Input/Output," the act of moving data into and/or out of a running program.

**Input Record**

A single chunk of data that is read in by `awk`. Usually, an `awk` input record consists of one line of text. (See [Section 4.1 \[How Input Is Split into Records\]](#), page 49.)

**Integer** A whole number, i.e., a number that does not have a fractional part.

**Internationalization**

The process of writing or modifying a program so that it can use multiple languages without requiring further source code changes.

**Interpreter**

A program that reads human-readable source code directly, and uses the instructions in it to process data and produce results. `awk` is typically (but not always) implemented as an interpreter. See also "Compiler."

**Interval Expression**

A component of a regular expression that lets you specify repeated matches of some part of the regexp. Interval expressions were not originally available in `awk` programs.

**ISO** The International Standards Organization. This organization produces international standards for many things, including programming languages, such as C and C++. In the computer arena, important standards like those for C, C++, and POSIX become both American national and ISO international standards simultaneously. This book refers to Standard C as "ISO C" throughout.

**Java** A modern programming language originally developed by Sun Microsystems (now Oracle) supporting Object-Oriented programming. Although usually implemented by compiling to the instructions for a standard virtual machine (the JVM), the language can be compiled to native code.

**Keyword** In the `awk` language, a keyword is a word that has special meaning. Keywords are reserved and may not be used as variable names.

`gawk`'s keywords are: `BEGIN`, `BEGINFILE`, `END`, `ENDFILE`, `break`, `case`, `continue`, `default` `delete`, `do...while`, `else`, `exit`, `for...in`, `for`, `function`, `func`, `if`, `nextfile`, `next`, `switch`, and `while`.

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**Linux** See “GNU/Linux.”

**LGPL** See “Lesser General Public License.”

#### Localization

The process of providing the data necessary for an internationalized program to work in a particular language.

#### Logical Expression

An expression using the operators for logic, `AND`, `OR`, and `NOT`, written ‘`&&`’, ‘`||`’, and ‘`!`’ in `awk`. Often called Boolean expressions, after the mathematician who pioneered this kind of mathematical logic.

**Lvalue** An expression that can appear on the left side of an assignment operator. In most languages, lvalues can be variables or array elements. In `awk`, a field designator can also be used as an lvalue.

**Matching** The act of testing a string against a regular expression. If the regexp describes the contents of the string, it is said to *match* it.

#### Metacharacters

Characters used within a regexp that do not stand for themselves. Instead, they denote regular expression operations, such as repetition, grouping, or alternation.

**No-op** An operation that does nothing.

#### Null String

A string with no characters in it. It is represented explicitly in `awk` programs by placing two double quote characters next to each other (“”). It can appear in input data by having two successive occurrences of the field separator appear next to each other.

**Number** A numeric-valued data object. Modern `awk` implementations use double precision floating-point to represent numbers. Ancient `awk` implementations used single precision floating-point.

**Octal** Base-eight notation, where the digits are 0–7. Octal numbers are written in C using a leading ‘0’, to indicate their base. Thus, 013 is 11 (one times 8 plus 3). See [Section 6.1.1.2 \[Octal and Hexadecimal Numbers\]](#), page 89.

#### P1003.1, P1003.2

See “POSIX.”

**Pattern** Patterns tell `awk` which input records are interesting to which rules.

A pattern is an arbitrary conditional expression against which input is tested. If the condition is satisfied, the pattern is said to *match* the input record. A

typical pattern might compare the input record against a regular expression. (See [Section 7.1 \[Pattern Elements\]](#), page 111.)

**POSIX** The name for a series of standards that specify a Portable Operating System interface. The “IX” denotes the Unix heritage of these standards. The main standard of interest for `awk` users is *IEEE Standard for Information Technology, Standard 1003.1-2008*. The 2008 POSIX standard can be found online at <http://www.opengroup.org/onlinepubs/9699919799/>.

**Precedence**

The order in which operations are performed when operators are used without explicit parentheses.

**Private** Variables and/or functions that are meant for use exclusively by library functions and not for the main `awk` program. Special care must be taken when naming such variables and functions. (See [Section 12.1 \[Naming Library Function Global Variables\]](#), page 211.)

**Range (of input lines)**

A sequence of consecutive lines from the input file(s). A pattern can specify ranges of input lines for `awk` to process or it can specify single lines. (See [Section 7.1 \[Pattern Elements\]](#), page 111.)

**Recursion** When a function calls itself, either directly or indirectly. As long as this is not clear, refer to the entry for “recursion.” If this is clear, stop, and proceed to the next entry.

**Redirection**

Redirection means performing input from something other than the standard input stream, or performing output to something other than the standard output stream.

You can redirect input to the `getline` statement using the ‘<’, ‘|’, and ‘|&’ operators. You can redirect the output of the `print` and `printf` statements to a file or a system command, using the ‘>’, ‘>>’, ‘|’, and ‘|&’ operators. (See [Section 4.9 \[Explicit Input with getline\]](#), page 67, and [Section 5.6 \[Redirecting Output of print and printf\]](#), page 81.)

**Regex** See “Regular Expression.”

**Regular Expression**

A regular expression (“regex” for short) is a pattern that denotes a set of strings, possibly an infinite set. For example, the regular expression ‘R.\*xp’ matches any string starting with the letter ‘R’ and ending with the letters ‘xp’. In `awk`, regular expressions are used in patterns and in conditional expressions. Regular expressions may contain escape sequences. (See [Chapter 3 \[Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37.)

**Regular Expression Constant**

A regular expression constant is a regular expression written within slashes, such as `/foo/`. This regular expression is chosen when you write the `awk` program and cannot be changed during its execution. (See [Section 3.1 \[How to Use Regular Expressions\]](#), page 37.)

- Rule** A segment of an `awk` program that specifies how to process single input records. A rule consists of a *pattern* and an *action*. `awk` reads an input record; then, for each rule, if the input record satisfies the rule's pattern, `awk` executes the rule's action. Otherwise, the rule does nothing for that input record.
- Rvalue** A value that can appear on the right side of an assignment operator. In `awk`, essentially every expression has a value. These values are rvalues.
- Scalar** A single value, be it a number or a string. Regular variables are scalars; arrays and functions are not.
- Search Path**  
In `gawk`, a list of directories to search for `awk` program source files. In the shell, a list of directories to search for executable programs.
- Seed** The initial value, or starting point, for a sequence of random numbers.
- sed** See "Stream Editor."
- Shell** The command interpreter for Unix and POSIX-compliant systems. The shell works both interactively, and as a programming language for batch files, or shell scripts.
- Short-Circuit**  
The nature of the `awk` logical operators '&&' and '||'. If the value of the entire expression is determinable from evaluating just the lefthand side of these operators, the righthand side is not evaluated. (See [Section 6.3.3 \[Boolean Expressions\]](#), page 105.)
- Side Effect**  
A side effect occurs when an expression has an effect aside from merely producing a value. Assignment expressions, increment and decrement expressions, and function calls have side effects. (See [Section 6.2.3 \[Assignment Expressions\]](#), page 98.)
- Single Precision**  
An internal representation of numbers that can have fractional parts. Single precision numbers keep track of fewer digits than do double precision numbers, but operations on them are sometimes less expensive in terms of CPU time. This is the type used by some very old versions of `awk` to store numeric values. It is the C type `float`.
- Space** The character generated by hitting the space bar on the keyboard.
- Special File**  
A file name interpreted internally by `gawk`, instead of being handed directly to the underlying operating system—for example, `/dev/stderr`. (See [Section 5.7 \[Special File Names in gawk\]](#), page 84.)
- Stream Editor**  
A program that reads records from an input stream and processes them one or more at a time. This is in contrast with batch programs, which may expect to read their input files in entirety before starting to do anything, as well as with interactive programs which require input from the user.

- String** A datum consisting of a sequence of characters, such as ‘I am a string’. Constant strings are written with double quotes in the `awk` language and may contain escape sequences. (See [Section 3.2 \[Escape Sequences\]](#), page 38.)
- Tab** The character generated by hitting the `TAB` key on the keyboard. It usually expands to up to eight spaces upon output.
- Text Domain**  
A unique name that identifies an application. Used for grouping messages that are translated at runtime into the local language.
- Timestamp**  
A value in the “seconds since the epoch” format used by Unix and POSIX systems. Used for the `gawk` functions `mktime()`, `strftime()`, and `systemtime()`. See also “Epoch” and “UTC.”
- Unix** A computer operating system originally developed in the early 1970’s at AT&T Bell Laboratories. It initially became popular in universities around the world and later moved into commercial environments as a software development system and network server system. There are many commercial versions of Unix, as well as several work-alike systems whose source code is freely available (such as GNU/Linux, [NetBSD](#), [FreeBSD](#), and [OpenBSD](#)).
- UTC** The accepted abbreviation for “Universal Coordinated Time.” This is standard time in Greenwich, England, which is used as a reference time for day and date calculations. See also “Epoch” and “GMT.”
- Whitespace**  
A sequence of space, `TAB`, or newline characters occurring inside an input record or a string.

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Version 3, 29 June 2007

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