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Chapter 1: Overview

1 Overview

GNU RCS (Revision Control System) manages multiple revisions of files. RCS can store, retrieve, log, identify, and merge revisions. It is useful for files that are revised frequently, e.g. programs, documentation, graphics, and papers. It can handle text as well as binary files, although functionality is reduced for the latter.

A normal installation includes the commands: `ci`, `co`, `ident`, `merge`, `rcs`, `rcsclean`, `rcsdiff`, `rcsmerge` and `rlog` (see Chapter 2 [Usage], page 7). These are small and fast programs (amenable to scripting) and indeed the distribution also includes the script `rcsfreeze` showing some of the possibilities.

RCS works with versions stored on a single filesystem or machine, edited by one person at a time. Other version control systems, such as Bazaar (http://www.gnu.org/software/bazaar), CVS, Subversion, and Git, support distributed access in various ways. Which is more appropriate depends on the task at hand.

1.1 Credits

RCS was designed and built by Walter F. Tichy of Purdue University. RCS version 3 was released in 1983.


Paul Eggert of Twin Sun wrote the changes for RCS versions 5.5 and 5.6 (1991). Rich Braun of Kronos and Andy Glew of Intel contributed ideas for new options. Bill Hahn of Stratus contributed ideas for setuid support. Ideas for piece tables came from Joe Berkovitz of Stratus and Walter F. Tichy. Matt Cross of Stratus contributed test case ideas. Adam Hammer of Purdue QAed.


Thien-Thi Nguyen is responsible for RCS 5.8. He modernized the code base, build system, and manual pages, fixing some bugs on the way. He added standard `--help`, `--version` processing, and wrote the documentation you are reading (gladly taking inspiration from the paper\(^1\) and manpages originally written by Walter F. Tichy).

1.2 Concepts

1.2.1 Interaction model

The interaction model is straightforward. For each working file, you initialize its RCS file once, then enter a cycle of checkout, modification, and checkin operations. Along the way,

\(^1\) Source (troff) and several output formats are available from the RCS homepage (http://www.gnu.org/software/rcs/).
you can tweak some of the RCS file’s metadata, as well. All of this is done through RCS commands; you need not modify the RCS file directly (and in fact you should probably avoid doing so lest RCS become confused). This model is somewhat analogous to using a library (of books). With a library, you sign up for a library card (initialize), then enter a cycle of taking a book home (checkout), enjoying it (NB: without modification, one hopes), and returning it to the library (checkin).

Furthermore, you can compare revisions in the RCS file against each other, examine the user- (hopefully high) quality descriptions of the changes each revision embodies, merge selected revisions, and so forth.

### 1.2.2 Working file

RCS commands operate on one pair of files at a time. The *working file* is what you normally view and edit (e.g., a file of C programming language source code named `a.c`). Because the working file’s contents can be extracted from the RCS file (called *instantiating a working file*), it can be safely deleted to regain some disk space.

### 1.2.3 RCS file

The *RCS file* is a separate file, conventionally placed in the subdirectory `RCS`, wherein RCS commands organize the initial and subsequent revisions of the working file, associating with each revision a unique revision number along with the remembered particulars of the checkin that produced it. It also contains a *description* of the working file and various other metadata, described below.

The RCS file is also known (colloquially) as the “comma-v file”, due to its name often ending in ,v (e.g., `a.c,v`).

A *revision number* is a branch number followed by a dot followed by an integer, and a *branch number* is an odd number of integers separated by dot. A revision number with one dot (implying a branch number without any dots) is said to be on the trunk. All integers are positive. For example:

```
1.1 -- revision number for initial checkin (typically);
     branch number: 1

9.4.1.42 -- more complicated (perhaps after much gnarly hacking);
           branch number: 9.4.1

333.333.333 -- not a valid revision number;
               however, a perfectly valid branch number
```

The *branch point* of a non-trunk branch is the revision number formed by removing the branch’s trailing integer. To compute the *next higher* branch or revision number, add one to the trailing integer. The highest-numbered revision on a branch is called the *tip* of the branch (or *branch tip*). Continuing the example:

```
1.1 -- on trunk; no branch point;
      next higher branch number: 2
      next higher revision number: 1.2

9.4.1.42 -- not on trunk; branch point: 9.4
```
In addition to this “tree” of thus-linked revisions, the RCS file keeps track of the default branch, i.e., the branch whose tip corresponds to the most recent checkin; as well as the symbolic names, a list of associations between a user-supplied (and presumably meaningful) symbol and an underlying branch or revision number.

The RCS file contains two pieces of information used to implement its access control policy. The first is a list of usernames. If non-empty, only those users listed can modify the RCS file (via RCS commands). The second is a list of locks, i.e., association between a username and a revision number. If a lock username:revno exists, that means only username may modify revno (that is, do a checkin operation to deposit the next higher revision, or a higher revision number on the same branch as revno).

1.2.4 Fundamental operations

The checkin operation records the contents of the working file in the RCS file, assigning it a new (normally the next higher) revision number and recording the username, timestamp, state (a short symbol), and user-supplied log message (a textual description of the changes leading to that revision). It uses diff to find the differences between the tip of the default branch and the working file, thereby writing the minimal amount of information needed to be able to recreate the contents of the previous tip.

The checkout operation identifies a specific revision from the RCS file and either displays the content to standard output or instantiates a working file, overwriting any current instantiation with the selected revision. In either case, the content may undergo keyword expansion, which replaces text of the form ‘$Keyword$’ with (possibly) different text comprising the keyword and its value, depending on the current keyword expansion mode (see Section 2.1.4 [Substitution mode option], page 8).

1.2.5 Keywords

The keywords and their values are:

**Author** The login name of the user who checked in the revision.

**Date** The date and time the revision was checked in. May include an appended timezone offset.

**Header** A standard header containing the absolute RCS filename, the revision number, the date and time, the author, the state, and the locker (if locked). May include an appended timezone offset.

**Id** Same as ‘Header’, except that only the basename appears (no directory components).

**Locker** The login name of the user who locked the revision (empty if not locked).
Log The log message supplied during checkin, preceded by a header containing the RCS filename, the revision number, the author, and the date and time. May include an appended timezone offset.

Existing log messages are not replaced. Instead, the new log message is inserted after `$Log:...$`. This is useful for accumulating a complete change log in a source file.

Each inserted line is prefixed by the string that prefixes the `$Log$` line. For example, if the `$Log$` line is

```
// $Log: tan.cc $
```

then RCS prefixes each line of the log with ‘// ’ (slash, slash, space). This is useful for languages with comments that go to the end of the line.

The convention for other languages is to use a ‘* ’ (space, asterisk, space) prefix inside a multiline comment. For example, the initial log comment of a C program conventionally is of the following form:

```
/*
 * $Log$
 */
```

For backwards compatibility with older versions of RCS, if the log prefix is ‘/’ or ‘(*’ surrounded by optional white space, inserted log lines contain a space instead of ‘/’ or ‘(‘; however, this usage is obsolescent and should not be relied on.

Name The symbolic name used to check out the revision, if any. For example, ‘co -rJoe’ generates ‘$Name: Joe $’. Plain co generates just ‘$Name: $’.

RCSfile The basename of the RCS file.

Revision The revision number assigned to the revision.

Source The absolute RCS filename.

State The state assigned to the revision with the –s option of rcs or ci.

1.3 Quick tour

This section complements the preceding section (see Section 1.2 [Concepts], page 1), presenting a handful of RCS commands in quick succession. For details on individual RCS commands, See Chapter 2 [Usage], page 7.

Suppose you have a file f.c that you wish to put under control of RCS. If you have not already done so, make an RCS directory with the command:

```
mkdir RCS
```

Then invoke the checkin command:

```
ci f.c
```

This command creates an RCS file in directory RCS, stores f.c into it as revision 1.1, and deletes f.c. It also asks you for a description. The description should be a synopsis of the contents of the file. All later checkin commands will ask you for a log entry, which should summarize the changes that you made.

To get back the working file f.c in the previous example, use the checkout command:
co f.c
This command extracts the latest revision from the RCS file and writes it into f.c. If you
want to edit f.c, you must lock it as you check it out, with the command:
co -l f.c
You can now edit f.c. Suppose after some editing you want to know what changes that
you have made. The command:
rcsdiff f.c
tells you the difference between the most recently checked-in version and the working file.
You can check the file back in by invoking:
ci f.c
This increments the revision number properly. If ci complains with the message:
ci error: no lock set by your name
then you have tried to check in a file even though you did not lock it when you checked it
out. Of course, it is too late now to do the checkout with locking, because another checkout
would overwrite your modifications. Instead, invoke:
rcs -l f.c
This command will lock the latest revision for you, unless somebody else got ahead of you
already. In this case, you’ll have to negotiate with that person.

Locking assures that you, and only you, can check in the next update, and avoids nasty
problems if several people work on the same file. Even if a revision is locked, it can still be
checked out for reading, compiling, etc. All that locking prevents is a checkin by anybody
but the locker.

If your RCS file is private, i.e., if you are the only person who is going to deposit revisions
into it, strict locking is not needed and you can turn it off. If strict locking is turned off,
the owner of the RCS file need not have a lock for checkin; all others still do. Turning strict
locking off and on is done with the commands:
rcs -U f.c  # disable strict locking
rcs -L f.c  # enable strict locking

If you don’t want to clutter your working directory with RCS files, create a subdirectory
called RCS in your working directory, and move all your RCS files there. RCS commands
will look first into that directory to find needed files. All the commands discussed above
will still work, without any modification. See Section 2.1 [Common elements], page 7.

To avoid the deletion of the working file during checkin (in case you want to continue
editing or compiling), invoke one of:
ci -l f.c  # checkin + locked checkout
ci -u f.c  # checkin + unlocked checkout
These commands check in f.c as usual, then perform an implicit checkout. The first form
also locks the checked in revision, the second one doesn’t. Thus, these options save you one
checkout operation. The first form is useful if you want to continue editing, the second one
if you just want to read the file. Both update the keyword substitutions in your working
file see Section 1.2 [Concepts], page 1.

You can give ci the number you want assigned to a checked-in revision. Assume all your
revisions were numbered 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc., and you would like to start release 2. Either of
the commands:
assigns the number 2.1 to the new revision. From then on, \texttt{ci} will number the subsequent revisions with 2.2, 2.3, etc. The corresponding \texttt{co} commands:

\begin{verbatim}
ci -r2 f.c
co -r2 f.c
\end{verbatim}

retrieve the latest revision numbered 2.x and the revision 2.1, respectively. \texttt{co} without a revision number selects the latest revision on the trunk, i.e. the highest revision with a number consisting of two fields. Numbers with more than two fields are needed for branches. For example, to start a branch at revision 1.3, invoke:

\begin{verbatim}
ci -r1.3.1 f.c
\end{verbatim}

This command starts a branch numbered 1 at revision 1.3, and assigns the number 1.3.1.1 to the new revision. Here is a diagram showing the new revision in relation to its branch and the trunk.

\begin{verbatim}
  1.1 -- 1.2 -- 1.3 -- 1.4 -- 1.5
     |       [1.3.1] -- 1.3.1.1
\end{verbatim}

For more information about branches, See Section 1.2 [Concepts], page 1.
2 Usage

This chapter describes how to invoke RCS commands, including common command-line elements, as well options specific to each command.

2.1 Common elements

All RCS commands accept --help and --version. See Section “Command-Line Interfaces” in The GNU Coding Standards.

Aside from --help and --version, RCS commands take the form ‘-letter[arg]’, i.e., a hyphen followed by a single letter, optionally followed by extra information. The square braces mean that the extra information is optional. (No square braces means that the extra information is required.) In any case, when specified, the extra information must abut the letter; there can be no intervening whitespace.

```
co -u 1.4 foo  # wrong, space between -u and 1.4
co -u1.4 foo   # ok
```

Furthermore, options must appear before file names (if any) on the command line.

```
ident foo -q   # wrong, option after file name
ident -q foo   # ok
```

Lastly, pairs of RCS and working files can be specified in three ways: (a) both are given, (b) only the working file is given, (c) only the RCS file is given. For (a), both RCS and working files may have arbitrary directory components; RCS commands pair them up intelligently. For (b), RCS commands will look first into the directory ./RCS, if it exists, to find the associated RCS file.

2.1.1 Revision options

As to be expected in a revision control system, many options are of the form ‘-flag[rev]’, where flag is a single letter (e.g., ‘r’). If ommitted, rev defaults to the latest revision on the default branch. A revision can be specified in many ways:

```
br.n  Straightforward dot-notation, where br specifies the branch.

.n     Like br.n, using the default branch.

br     Like br.n, using the a command-specific computation of n, given the current tip i. For ci (see Section 2.2 [ci], page 11), n would be i + 1, while for other commands n would be simply i.

name   This is the symbolic name of a revision, as assigned previously by a ci -n or ci -N command.

$      The command computes the effective revision by examining the values of keyword expansions in the working file.
```

For commands that accept a range of revisions, the syntax is generally rev1:rev2, i.e., two revisions (specified as described above) separated by a colon.
2.1.2 Date option

Some commands accept an option of the form ‘-d date’ to specify a date, an absolute point in time (to second resolution), expressed in a date format. These also accept ‘-z zone’ to specify the timezone. The special value ‘LT’ stands for the local time zone. RCS recognizes many date formats and time zones. For example, the following dates are equivalent if local time is January 11, 1990, 8pm Pacific Standard Time, eight hours west of Coordinated Universal Time (UTC):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 pm LT</td>
<td>default is UTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 AM, Jan. 12, 1990</td>
<td>ISO 8601 (UTC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-01-12 04:00:00+00</td>
<td>ISO 8601 (UTC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-01-11 20:00:00-08</td>
<td>traditional RCS format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/01/12 04:00:00</td>
<td>output of ctime(3) + LT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu Jan 11 20:00:00 1990 LT</td>
<td>output of date(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu Jan 11 20:00:00 PST 1990</td>
<td>output of date(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri Jan 12 04:00:00 GMT 1990</td>
<td>output of date(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu, 11 Jan 1990 20:00:00 -0800</td>
<td>Internet RFC 822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-January-1990, 04:00 WET</td>
<td>Internet RFC 822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most fields in the date and time can be defaulted. The default time zone is normally UTC, but this can be overridden by the -z option. The other defaults are determined in the order year, month, day, hour, minute, and second (most to least significant). At least one of these fields must be provided. For omitted fields that are of higher significance than the highest provided field, the time zone’s current values are assumed. For all other omitted fields, the lowest possible values are assumed. For example, without -z, the date ‘20, 10:30’ defaults to ‘10:30:00 UTC’ of the 20th of the UTC time zone’s current month and year. Note that for the shell, the date/time must be quoted if it contains spaces.

RCS also accepts some other formats which specify only the date portion (omitting the time portion):

- YYYY-DDD: DDD is the day of year, 1-366.
- YYYY-wWWW-D: WW is the ISO week number, 0-53 (actually, ISO week numbers are 1-53; week 0 is a GNU RCS extension); and D is the ISO day number, 1-7 (Monday through Sunday).

2.1.3 Description option

Some commands accept an option of the form ‘-t-text’ or ‘-tfile-name’. This option is to set or update the RCS file description text. In the first form, text is used directly, excluding the leading hyphen (‘-’) that distinguishes the two forms. In the second form, the description text is taken from the contents of file-name.

2.1.4 Substitution mode option

Some commands accept an option of the form -k subst, used to control how keywords (see Section 1.2 [Concepts], page 1) are expanded in the working file. In the following table of subst values, the example keyword is ‘Revision’ and its value is ‘5.13’.

- kv: Generate ‘$Revision: 5.13 $’ (dollar-sign, keyword, colon, space, value, space, dollar-sign). A locker’s name is inserted in the value of the Header, Id and
Locker keyword strings only as a file is being locked, i.e., by ci -l and co -l. This is the default substitution mode.

kv1 Like -kkv, except that a locker’s name is always inserted if the given revision is currently locked.

k Generate ‘$Revision$’ (dollar-sign, keyword, dollar-sign). This is useful when comparing different revisions of a file. Log messages are inserted after Log keywords even if -kk is specified, since this tends to be more useful when merging changes.

o Like -kkv, but use the old value present in the working file just before it was checked in. This can be useful for file formats that cannot tolerate any changes to substrings that happen to take the form of keyword strings.

b Like -ko, but do all file i/o in binary mode. This makes little difference on POSIX and Unix hosts, but on DOS-like hosts one should use rcs -i -kb to initialize an RCS file intended to be used for binary files. Also, on all hosts, rcsmerge normally refuses to merge files when -kb is in effect.

v Generate ‘5.13’ (value only). Further keyword substitution cannot be performed once the keyword names are removed, so this should be used with care. Because of this danger of losing keywords, -kv cannot be combined with -l, and the owner write permission of the working file is turned off; to edit the file later, check it out again without -kv.

2.1.5 Log message option

Both ci and rcs allow a log message to be specified with the -m option. If the msg argument to this option is empty, RCS uses the default ‘*** empty log message ***’. This particular message is handled specially (i.e., filtered out) by rlog.

2.1.6 Misc common options

Other common options are -I, -q, -s, -T, -V, -w, -x.

-I This option enables interactive mode. More precisely, it forces interactive mode, whereby RCS commands believe that their standard input is a terminal, normally a precondition for displaying a prompt to receive input (such as a log message on checkin). The intention of -I is for scripting situations where standard input is actually not a terminal but you know beforehand (without prompting) that input is needed and you are ready to provide it on standard input anyway.

-q This option enables quiet mode. Commands work silently (unless there is an error condition), and suppress warnings and prompts.

-sstate Specify the state to be state.

-T This option controls how commands timestamp the RCS file. Normally, RCS commands set the RCS file’s timestamp when modifying it in the “natural” way (without taking any particular care). With -T, on the other hand, the commands either preserve the timestamp (for standalone lock/unlock operations), or use the timestamp of the working file (for ci).
This can be useful if the RCS file is found in a makefile target’s list of pre-requisites (see Section “Rule Syntax” in The GNU Make Manual), that is, if some target should be rebuilt if the RCS file is newer than it. In that case, you can do `rcs -u -T`, for example, to unlock a revision in the RCS file without triggering a recompilation.

-`V` Behave like `--version`, i.e., display command version information and exit successfully. NB: This option is obsolete and its support will be removed in some future release.

-`-Vn` `n` specifies the RCS (major) version to emulate. Valid values for `n` are: 3, 4, 5. Version 5 is the current version, so `-V5` does nothing special.

In versions prior to 5, RCS outputs `\t` (tab, U+09) between the `:` (colon) and the value (for keyword substitution) instead of space, uses the RCS file `comment` string to prefix each line in the Log expansion instead of computing it on the fly from the input text, writes/reads localtime instead of UTC, and displays slightly different output for `rlog`.

For version 4, the `Header` expansion unconditionally includes `Locker: locker`, as if the `kvl` substitution mode were specified (see Section 2.1.4 [Substitution mode option], page 8).

For version 3, the `Header` expansion omits the directories from the filename and says only `Locked` instead of the state.

-`-wlogin` Some commands accept an option of the form ‘-`wlogin`’ to specify the login name of the author of a revision, i.e., “who” is responsible.

-`-xsuff` Specify `suff` as the slash-separated list of file name suffixes used to recognize an RCS file. The default value is ‘,v/’, that is, first try with ‘,v’ then try with an empty suffix.

This basename search occurs within (i.e., starting from the beginning) the larger directory search loop, which comprises two candidates: `d/RCS` and `d`, where `d` is the directory component of the working file name. For example, given the working file `a.c` in the current directory, RCS tries, in order, these candidates:

- `/RCS/a.c,v`
- `/RCS/a.c`
- `/a.c,v`
- `/a.c`

Note that the last candidate is impossible (and is in fact discarded), because the working and RCS files cannot have the same name.

2.1.7 Environment

Various environment variables influence how RCS works.

**RCSINIT**

Another way to set common options is with the ‘RCSINIT’ environment variable. This is a space-separated list of options. Use ‘\’ (backslash) to escape significant space.

For example:
# Set the value; make it available to subsequent commands.
RCSINIT="-q -x/,v -zLT"
export RCSINIT

# Use it (implicitly).
\rlog -L foo

This example, in Bourne shell syntax, arranges for RCS commands to operate as if each command-line had prepended ‘-q -x/,v -zLT’ to the rest of the command-line. The effective command-line that \rlog sees is thus ‘-q -x/,v -zLT -L foo’.

RCS_MEM_LIMIT

Normally, for speed, commands either memory map or copy into memory the RCS file if its size is less than the memory limit, currently defaulting to “unlimited”. Otherwise (or if the initially-tried speedy ways fail), the commands fall back to using standard i/o routines.

You can adjust the memory limit by setting the ‘RCS_MEM_LIMIT’ environment variable to a numeric value (measured in kilobytes). An empty value is silently ignored.

As a side effect, specifying the memory limit inhibits fall-back to slower routines. (This env var is mostly intended for testing RCS; normally, you can leave it unset. Probably it will be removed in a future release.)

TMPDIR

TMP

TEMP

Commands sometimes create temporary files, normally in a system-dependent directory, such as /tmp. You can override this directory by specifying another one as the value of one of the environment variables TMPDIR, TMP, or TEMP (checked in that order).

LOGNAME

USER

Absent -wlogin, or when login is omitted (see Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9), commands check environment variables LOGNAME and USER (in that order). If neither of these are set, RCS queries the host for, and uses, your login.

2.2 Invoking ci

\rcs ci [options] file ...
(or “ci” instead of “rcs ci”)

The ci command adds a revision to the RCS file reflecting the current state of the working file. This operation is also known as “checkin”.

-f[rev] Force new entry, even if no content changed.
-I[rev]
-q[rev] See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.
-i[rev] Initial checkin; error if the RCS file already exists.
-j[rev] Just checkin, don’t initialize; error if the RCS file does not exist.
-k[rev] Compute revision from working file keywords.
-r Release lock and delete working file.
-l[rev] Like -r, but immediately checkout locked (co l) afterwards.
-u[rev] Like -l, but checkout unlocked (co u).

Multiple flags in -{fiIjkIklMqrw} may be given, except for -r, -l, -u, which are mutually exclusive. For a fully specified revision of the form br.n, n must be greater than any existing on br, or br must be new. If rev is omitted, compute it from the last lock (co l), perhaps starting a new branch. If there is no lock, use defbr (L+1). See Section 2.1.1 [Revision options], page 7.

-d[date]
-zzone See Section 2.1.2 [Date option], page 8. If no date specified, use the working file modification time.
-m[msg] Use msg as the log message. See Section 2.1.5 [Log message option], page 9.
-nname
-Nname Assign symbolic name to the entry. For -n, name must be new (no previous assignment). For -N, overwrite any previous assignment.
-sstate See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9. Set the state.
-t-text
t-file-name See Section 2.1.3 [Description option], page 8.
-T Set the RCS file’s modification time to the new revision’s time if the former precedes the latter and there is a new revision; preserve the RCS file’s modification time otherwise.
-wwho Use who as the author.
-V
-Vn
-xsuff See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.

2.3 Invoking co

rcs co [options] file ...
(or “co” instead of “rcs co”)

The co command retrieves a revision from the RCS file, writing a new working file. This operation is also known as “checkout”.

-I[rev]
-q[rev] See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.
Chapter 2: Usage

-`r[rev]` Normal checkout.
-`l[rev]` Like `-r`, but also lock.
-`u[rev]` Like `-l`, but unlock.

Multiple flags in `-{flMpqru}` may be given, except for `-r`, `-l`, `-u`, which are mutually exclusive. See Section 2.1.1 [Revision options], page 7.

-`ksubst` See Section 2.1.4 [Substitution mode option], page 8.
-`ddate` See Section 2.1.2 [Date option], page 8. Select latest before or on `date`.
-`zzone` See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9. Select matching state.
-`S` Enable "self-same" mode. In this mode, the owner of a lock is unimportant, just that it exists. Effectively, this prevents you from checking out the same revision twice.

```
$ whoami
ttn

$ co -l -f z
RCS/z,v --> z
revision 1.1 (locked)
done

$ co -S -l -f z
RCS/z,v --> z
c: RCS/z,v: Revision 1.1 is already locked by ttn.
```

-`T` Preserve the modification time on the RCS file even if it changes because a lock is added or removed.

-`wwho` Select matching login `who`.

-`V` `V`

-`x suff` See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.

2.4 Invoking `ident`

```
ident [options] [file ...]
```

If no `file` is specified, scan standard input. The `ident` command scans its input for keywords (see Section 1.2 [Concepts], page 1), displaying to standard output what it finds.

-`q` Normally, if no patterns are found for a file, `ident` emits a warning. This option suppresses the warning.
Note that \texttt{-Vn} is not a valid option for \texttt{ident}, in contrast to most other RCS commands (see Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9).

In addition to the normal keyword pattern, for Subversion 1.2 (and later) compatibility\footnote{The \textit{fixed-length keyword syntax} is described in detail in Version Control with Subversion, chapter “Advanced Topics”, section “Keyword Substitution.”}, \texttt{ident} also recognizes patterns having one of the forms:

\begin{verbatim}
$\texttt{keyword}: \texttt{text}\$

;; two colons and space after keyword

$\texttt{keyword}: \texttt{text}$

;; space before ending $

$\texttt{keyword}: \texttt{text}$

;; two colons and space after keyword

$\texttt{keyword}: \texttt{text}\#

;; hash before ending $
\end{verbatim}

\section*{2.5 Invoking merge}

\texttt{merge [options] receiving-sibling parent other-sibling}

The \texttt{merge} command combines the differences between a the parent and the other sibling, and the differences between the parent and the receiving sibling. It writes the result to the receiving sibling.

\begin{itemize}
\item \texttt{-A}
\item \texttt{-E}
\item \texttt{-e}
Use \texttt{diff3 -A, -E} (default), or \texttt{-e}, respectively.
\item \texttt{-p}
Write to stdout instead of overwriting \texttt{receiving-sibling}.
\item \texttt{-q}
See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9. Suppress conflict warnings.
\item \texttt{-Llabel}
(up to three times) Specify the conflict labels for \texttt{receiving-sibling}, \texttt{parent} and \texttt{other-sibling}, respectively.
\item \texttt{-V}
Note that \texttt{-Vn} is not a valid option for \texttt{merge}, in contrast to most other RCS commands (see Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9).
\end{itemize}

\section*{2.6 Invoking rcs}

The \texttt{rcs} command is unique in the set of RCS programs in that it has two usages, the modern (for RCS 5.9.0 and later) and the legacy.

\subsection*{2.6.1 modern}

\texttt{rcs [options] command [command-arg ...]}

This \texttt{rcs} usage dispatches to \texttt{command}, passing along \texttt{command-arg...} without interpretation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \texttt{--commands}
Display a list of available commands, including a one-line description, and exit successfully.
\end{itemize}
--aliases
Display a list of command aliases and exit successfully.

--help command
Display help for a particular command and exit successfully. For example, to display help for the legacy interface, use:

   --help frob

2.6.2 legacy

   rcs frob [options] file ...
   (or “rcs” instead of “rcs frob”)

This rcs usage performs various administrative operations on the RCS file, depending on the options given.

-i Create and initialize a new RCS file.
-L Set strict locking.
-U Set non-strict locking.
-M Don’t send mail when breaking someone else’s lock.
-T Preserve the modification time on the RCS file unless a revision is removed.
-I -q
See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.
-alogins Append logins (comma-separated list of usernames) to access-list.
-e[logins]
   Erase logins (comma-separated list of usernames) from access-list. If logins is omitted, clear the access-list.
-A[file-name]
   Append access-list of file-name to current access-list.
-b[rev] Set default branch to that of rev or highest branch on trunk if rev is omitted.
-l[rev] Lock a revision.
-u[rev] Unlock a revision.
-cstring Set comment leader to string. NB: Don’t use; obsolete.
-ksubst See Section 2.1.4 [Substitution mode option], page 8.
-mrev:[msg]
   Replace log message with msg. See Section 2.1.5 [Log message option], page 9.
-nname[:[rev]]
   If rev is omitted, delete symbolic name. Otherwise, associate name with rev; name must be new.
-Nname[:[rev]]
   Like -n, but overwrite any previous assignment.
-orange Delete (also known as “outdate”) revisions in range:
rev single revision
br latest revision on branch br
rev1:rev2
rev1 to rev2 on same branch, inclusive
:rev beginning of branch to rev
rev: rev to end of branch

-sstate[:rev]
See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9. Set state.

-t-text
-tfile-name
See Section 2.1.3 [Description option], page 8. Replace description.

-V
-Vn
-xsuff See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.

These options have no effect, and are included solely for consistency with other commands
(see Section 2.1.7 [Environment], page 10): -zzone.

2.7 Invoking rcs clean

rcs clean [options] [file ...]
(or “rcsclean” instead of “rcs clean”)

The rcs clean command removes working files that are not being worked on. If given -u, it
also unlocks and removes working files that are being worked on but have not changed. If
no file is specified, operate on all the working files in the current directory.

-r[rev] Specify revision.
-u[rev] Unlock if is locked and no differences found.
-n[rev] Dry run (no act, don’t operate).
-q[rev] See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.
-ksubst See Section 2.1.4 [Substitution mode option], page 8.
-T Preserve the modification time on the RCS file even it changes because a lock
is removed.

-V
-Vn
-xsuff See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.
-zzone See Section 2.1.2 [Date option], page 8.
2.8 Invoking rcsdiff

rcs diff [options] file ...
(or “rcsdiff” instead of “rcs diff”)

The rcsdiff command runs diff to compare two revisions in an RCS file. See Section “Invoking diff” in The GNU Diffutils Manual.

-rrrev (zero, one, or two times) Name a revision. If given two revisions (‘-rrrev1 -rrrev2’), compare those revisions. If given only one revision (‘-rrrev’), compare the working file with it. If given no revisions, compare the working file with the latest revision on the default branch.

-ksubst See Section 2.1.4 [Substitution mode option], page 8.

-q See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.

-V

-Vn

-xsuff See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.

-zzone See Section 2.1.2 [Date option], page 8.

These options have no effect, and are included solely for consistency with other commands (see Section 2.1.7 [Environment], page 10): -T.

Additionally, the following options (and their argument, if any) are passed to the underlying diff command:

-0, -1, -2, -3, -4, -5, -6, -7, -8, -9, -B, -C, -D, -F, -H, -I,
-L, -U, -W, -a, -b, -c, -d, -e, -f, -h, -i, -n, -p, -t, -u, -w, -y,
long options (that start with "--")

(Not all of these options are meaningful.)

2.9 Invoking rcsmerge

rcs merge [options] file
(or “rcsmerge” instead of “rcs merge”)

The rcsmerge command incorporates the changes between two revisions of an RCS file into the corresponding working file.

-A

-E

-e Passed to the diff3 command. The default if none are specified is -E. With -e, suppress warnings on conflict. The -A style generates the most verbose output. See Section “Invoking diff3” in The GNU Diffutils Manual.


-q[rev] See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.

-rrrev (one or two times) specify a revision.

One or two revisions must be specified (using -p, -q, -r). If only one is specified, the second revision defaults to the latest revision on the default branch.
-ksubst  See Section 2.1.4 [Substitution mode option], page 8.
-\V
-\Vn
-xsuff  See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.
-zzone  See Section 2.1.2 [Date option], page 8.

These options have no effect, and are included solely for consistency with other commands (see Section 2.1.7 [Environment], page 10): -T.

2.10 Invoking rlog

\texttt{rcs log [options] file ...}
(or “rlog” instead of “rcs log”)

The \texttt{rlog} command displays information about RCS files.

-\L  Ignore RCS files with no locks set.
-\R  Print only the name of the RCS file.
-\h  Print only the “header” information.
-\t  Like -\h, but also include the description.
-\N  Omit symbolic names.
-\b  Select the default branch.

-\ddates  See Section 2.1.2 [Date option], page 8. Select revisions based on timestamp, in the range \texttt{dates}, with spec:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \texttt{d} single revision \texttt{d} or earlier
  \item \texttt{d1<d2} \texttt{d2>d1} between \texttt{d1} and \texttt{d2}, exclusive
  \item \texttt{<d} \texttt{d>} before \texttt{d}
  \item \texttt{>d}
  \item \texttt{d<} after \texttt{d}
\end{itemize}

Instead of ‘<’ or ‘>’, you can use ‘<=’ or ‘=>’, respectively, to specify inclusive ranges. \texttt{dates} may also be a list of semicolon-separated specs.

-\l[who]  Select revisions locked by \texttt{who} (comma-separated list of usernames) only, or by anyone if \texttt{who} is omitted.

-\r[revs]  Select revisions in \texttt{revs}, a comma-separated list of range specs, one of: \texttt{rev}, \texttt{rev:}, \texttt{:rev}, \texttt{rev1:rev2}.

-\s[states]  See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9. \texttt{states} can also be a comma-separated list of states. Select revisions with specified state(s).

-\w[who]  Select revisions checked in by \texttt{who} (comma-separated list of usernames), or by the user if \texttt{who} is omitted.
-V

-\texttt{Vn}

\texttt{-xsuff} \quad \text{See Section 2.1.6 [Misc common options], page 9.}

\texttt{-zzone} \quad \text{See Section 2.1.2 [Date option], page 8.}

These options have no effect, and are included solely for consistency with other commands (see Section 2.1.7 [Environment], page 10): ‘\texttt{-q}’, ‘\texttt{-T}’.
3 Hacking

This chapter, in contrast to the previous (see Chapter 2 [Usage], page 7), is introspective. It describes an important aspect of RCS interop with other programs, and development ideas and methods.

3.1 File format

An RCS file's contents are described by the grammar below\(^1\). Overall, the format is free-format text. In most environments RCS uses the ISO 8859/1 encoding: visible graphic characters are (octal) codes 041–176 and 240–377, and whitespace characters are codes 010–015 and 040.

**TODO:** Discuss or point to encoding compatibility issues.

3.1.1 File format grammar

The meta syntax in this section uses the following conventions: ‘|’ (U+7C) separates alternatives; ‘{’ (U+7B) and ‘}’ (U+7D) enclose optional phrases; ‘{’ and ‘}’ (trailing U+2A) enclose phrases that can be repeated zero or more times; ‘{’ and ‘}+’ (trailing U+2B) enclose phrases that must appear at least once and can be repeated; terminal symbols are in `'"` (two U+22).

\[
\text{rcstext} ::= \text{admin} \{\text{delta}\}^{*} \text{desc} \{\text{deltatext}\}^{*}
\]

\[
\text{admin} ::= \text{"head"} \{\text{num}\}^{";"} \\
\{ \text{"branch"} \{\text{num}\}^{";"} \} \\
\text{"access"} \{\text{id}\}^{";"} \\
\text{"symbols"} \{ \text{sym}^{":"} \text{num}^{";"} \}^{*}^{";"} \\
\text{"locks"} \{ \text{id}^{":"} \text{num}^{";"} \}^{*}^{";"} \\
\{ \text{"strict"}^{";"} \}^{*} \\
\{ \text{"integrity"} \{\text{intstring}\}^{";"} \}^{*} \\
\{ \text{"comment"} \{\text{string}\}^{";"} \}^{*} \\
\{ \text{"expand"} \{\text{string}\}^{";"} \}^{*} \\
\]

\[
\text{delta} ::= \text{num} \\
\text{"date"} \text{ num }^{";"} \\
\text{"author"} \text{ id }^{";"} \\
\text{"state"} \{\text{id}\}^{";"} \\
\text{"branches"} \{\text{num}\}^{*}^{";"} \\
\text{"next"} \{\text{num}\}^{*}^{";"} \\
\{ \text{"commitid"} \text{ sym }^{";"} \}^{*} \\
\]

\[
\text{desc} ::= \text{"desc"} \text{ string}
\]

\[
\text{deltatext} ::= \text{num} \\
\text{"log"} \text{ string} \\
\text{"text"} \text{ string}
\]

\(^1\) This section is adapted from the ‘rcsfile(5)’ manpage, written by Walter F. Tichy.
num ::= { digit | "." }+
digit ::= "0" through "9"
id ::= { idchar | "." }+
sym ::= {idchar}+
idchar ::= any visible graphic character except special
special ::= "$" | "," | "." | ":" | ";" | ":@"
string ::= ":@" { any character, with @ doubled }* ":@"
word ::= id | num | string | ":`
intchar ::= any character, except @
thirdp ::= ":L" {intchar}*
intstring ::= ":@" {intchar}* {thirdp}* ":@

3.1.2 Additional particulars of the file format

- In releases prior to 5.8 (2011-08-30), the grammar included the production:
  
  `newphrase ::= id word* ";```

  and used it in the admin, delta and deltatext productions. This allowed third-party programs to interoperate with RCS by storing opaque (to RCS) data in the file.

  As of 5.8, in the name of progress (towards more systematic file integrity support), the only area reserved for third-party interop is in the (string) value of the integrity field, specifically after the first formfeed (U+0C). A further restriction (for all programs) is that the integrity value must not contain '@'.

- Whitespace has no significance except in strings. However, whitespace cannot appear within an id, num, or sym, and an RCS file must end with newline (U+0A). Strings are enclosed by '@' (U+40). If a string contains a '@', it must be doubled; otherwise, strings can contain arbitrary binary data.

- Identifiers are case sensitive. Keywords are in lower case only. The sets of keywords and identifiers can overlap.

- Dates, which appear after the date keyword, are of the form Y.mm.dd.hh.mm.ss, where Y is the year, mm the month (01–12), dd the day (01–31), hh the hour (00–23), mm the minute (00–59), and ss the second (00–60). Y contains just the last two digits of the year for years from 1900 through 1999, and all the digits of years thereafter. Dates use the Gregorian calendar; times use UTC.

- The delta nodes form a tree. All nodes whose numbers consist of a single pair (e.g., 2.3, 2.1, 1.3) are on the trunk, and are linked through the next field in order of decreasing
numbers. The head field in the admin node points to the head of that sequence (i.e., contains the highest pair). The branch node in the admin node indicates the default branch (or revision) for most RCS operations. If empty, the default branch is the highest branch on the trunk.

All delta nodes whose numbers consist of $2n$ fields ($n \geq 2$) (e.g., 3.1.1.1, 2.1.2.2) are linked as follows. All nodes whose first $2n-1$ number fields are identical are linked through the next field in order of increasing numbers. For each such sequence, the delta node whose number is identical to the first $2n-2$ number fields of the delta nodes on that sequence is called the branchpoint. The branches field of a node contains a list of the numbers of the first nodes of all sequences for which it is a branchpoint. This list is ordered in increasing numbers. See Figure 3.1.
3.2 Still missing

RCS is still missing some features. The following is an unordered list of “to-do musings” kept by the RCS maintainers. If you would like to hack on an item, See Section 3.3 [Reporting bugs], page 25.

- Add an option to `rcsmerge` so that it can use an arbitrary program to do the 3-way merge, instead of the default `merge`. Likewise for `rcsdiff` and `diff`. It should be possible to pass arbitrary options to these programs, and to the subsidiary `co` invocations.
- Add format options for finer control over the output of `ident` and `rlog`. E.g. there should be an easy way for rlog to output lines like ‘`src/main.c 2.4 wft`’, one for
each locked revision. rlog options should have three orthogonal types: selecting files, selecting revisions, and selecting rlog format.

- Add format options for finer control over the output of keyword strings. E.g. there should be some way to prepend `@(#)`, and there should be some way to change `$` to some other character to disable further substitution. These options should make the resulting files uneditable, like `-kv`.
- Add long options, e.g. `--keyword-substitution`. Unfortunately RCS’s option syntax is incompatible with getopt. Perhaps the best way is to overload rcs, e.g., `rcs diff --keyword-substitution=old file` instead of `rcsdiff -ko file`.
- rlog `-r M:N` should work even if M and N have different numbers of fields, so long as M is an ancestor of N or vice versa.
- rcs should evaluate options in order; this allows `rcs -oS -nS`.
- Be able to redo your most recent checkin with minor changes.
- co `-u` shouldn’t complain about a `+w` working file if contents don’t change.
- Add a `-' option to take the list of file names from standard input. Perhaps the file names should be null-terminated, not newline-terminated, so that those that contain newlines are handled properly.
- Permit multiple option–filename pairs, e.g., `co -r1.4 a -r1.5 b`.
- Add an option to break a symbolic link to an RCS file, instead of breaking the hard link that it points to.
- Add ways to specify the earliest revision, the most recent revision, the earliest or latest revision on a particular branch, and the parent or child of some other revision.
- If a user has multiple locks, perhaps `ci` should fall back on the method of `ci -k` to figure out which revision to use.
- Add an option to `rcsclean` to clean directories recursively.
- Write an `rcsck` program that repairs corrupted RCS files, much as fsck repairs corrupted file systems. For example, it should remove stale lock files.
- Update the date parser to use the more modern `getdate.y` by Bellovin, Salz, and Berets, or the even more modern `getdate` by Moraes. None of these getdate implementations are as robust as RCS’s old warhorse in avoiding problems like arithmetic overflow, so they’ll have to be fixed first. (Perhaps we can use gnulib module `getdate`.)
- Break up the code into a library so that it’s easier to write new programs that manipulate RCS files, and so that useless code is removed from the existing programs. For example, the `rcs` command contains unnecessary keyword substitution baggage, and the `merge` command can be greatly pruned.
- Make it easier to use your favorite text editor to edit log messages, etc., instead of having to type them in irretrievably at the terminal.
- Let the user specify a search path for default branches, e.g., to use L as the default branch if it works, and M otherwise. Let the user require that at least one entry in the search path works. Let the user say that later entries in the search path are read only, i.e. one cannot check in changes to them. This should be an option settable by `RCSINIT`.
- Add a way for a user to see which revisions affected which lines.
• Have `rlog -nN F` print just the revision number that `N` translates to. E.g., `rlog -nB`. `F` would print the highest revision on the branch `B`. Use this to add an option `-bB` to `rcsbranch`, to freeze the named branch. This should interact well with default branches.

• Add a `co` option that prints the revision number before each line, as SCCS’s `get -m` does. [I implemented this for Emacs 22 as a subroutine of `vc-annotate`, q.v. —tttn]

3.3 Reporting bugs

To report bugs or suggest enhancements for GNU RCS, please visit its homepage (http://www.gnu.org/software/rcs/) to find directions on how to “file a bug report” online, or send electronic mail to help-rcs@gnu.org. (If you use the web interface, you don’t need to also send email, since that is done automatically.)

For bug reports, please include enough information for the maintainers to reproduce the problem. Generally speaking, that means:

• The RCS version, command(s) and manual section(s) involved.
• Hardware and operating system names and versions.
• The contents of any input files necessary to reproduce the bug.
• The expected behavior and/or output.
• A description of the problem and samples of any erroneous output.
• Options you gave to `configure` other than specifying installation directories.
• Anything else that you think would be helpful.

When in doubt whether something is needed or not, include it. It’s better to include too much than to leave out something important.

Patches are welcome; if possible, please make them with `git format-patch` and include `ChangeLog` entries (see Section “Change Log” in The GNU Emacs Manual). Please follow the existing coding style.
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