

[MS-STANXPOP3]:

Exchange Post Office Protocol Version 3 (POP3) Standards Support

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specifications and network programming art and, as such, assume that the reader either is familiar with the aforementioned material or has immediate access to it.

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This document describes the choices made when implementing the Post Office Protocol Version 3 (POP3) Standard. It identifies ambiguities and implementer choices and indicates the approach taken in the implementation. The details of the implementation itself are described in the specifications for the relevant protocols or data structures, not in this document.

Revision Summary

Date	Revision History	Revision Class	Comments
7/15/2009	1.0.0	Major	Initial Availability.
10/1/2008	1.1.0	Minor	Updated IP notice.
4/10/2009	2.0.0	Major	Updated applicable product releases.
7/15/2009	3.0.0	Major	Revised and edited technical content.
11/4/2009	4.0.0	Major	Updated and revised the technical content.
2/10/2010	4.0.0	None	Version 4.0.0 release
8/4/2010	4.1	Minor	Clarified the meaning of the technical content.
11/3/2010	4.1.1	Editorial	Changed language and formatting in the technical content.
3/18/2011	4.1.1	None	No changes to the meaning, language, and formatting of the technical content.
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9/14/2015	6.0	None	No changes to the meaning, language, or formatting of the

Date	Revision History	Revision Class	Comments
			technical content.
6/13/2016	6.0	None	No changes to the meaning, language, or formatting of the technical content.
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7/24/2018	7.0	Major	Significantly changed the technical content.
10/1/2018	8.0	Major	Significantly changed the technical content.

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1 Introduction

This document specifies the level of support provided by Exchange for the **Post Office Protocol - Version 3 (POP3)** service. The POP3 service of Microsoft Exchange Server is used by clients that implement the POP3 protocol to store and retrieve messages on the server.

1.1 Glossary

This document uses the following terms:

Post Office Protocol - Version 3 (POP3): A protocol that is used for accessing email from mail servers, as described in [\[RFC1939\]](#).

Secure Sockets Layer (SSL): A security protocol that supports confidentiality and integrity of messages in client and server applications that communicate over open networks. SSL supports server and, optionally, client authentication using X.509 certificates [\[X509\]](#) and [\[RFC5280\]](#). SSL is superseded by Transport Layer Security (TLS). TLS version 1.0 is based on SSL version 3.0 [\[SSL3\]](#).

Transmission Control Protocol (TCP): A protocol used with the Internet Protocol (IP) to send data in the form of message units between computers over the Internet. TCP handles keeping track of the individual units of data (called packets) that a message is divided into for efficient routing through the Internet.

MAY, SHOULD, MUST, SHOULD NOT, MUST NOT: These terms (in all caps) are used as defined in [\[RFC2119\]](#). All statements of optional behavior use either MAY, SHOULD, or SHOULD NOT.

1.2 References

Links to a document in the Microsoft Open Specifications library point to the correct section in the most recently published version of the referenced document. However, because individual documents in the library are not updated at the same time, the section numbers in the documents may not match. You can confirm the correct section numbering by checking the [Errata](#).

1.2.1 Normative References

We conduct frequent surveys of the normative references to assure their continued availability. If you have any issue with finding a normative reference, please contact dochelp@microsoft.com. We will assist you in finding the relevant information.

[MS-NLMP] Microsoft Corporation, "[NT LAN Manager \(NTLM\) Authentication Protocol](#)".

[MS-OXPOP3] Microsoft Corporation, "[Post Office Protocol Version 3 \(POP3\) Extensions](#)".

[RFC1939] Myers, J., and Rose, M., "Post Office Protocol - Version 3", STD 53, RFC 1939, May 1996, <http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc1939.txt>

[RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", BCP 14, RFC 2119, March 1997, <http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc2119.txt>

[RFC2449] Gellens, R., Newman, C., and Lundblade, L., "POP3 Extension Mechanism", RFC 2449, November 1998, <http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc2449.txt>

[RFC4121] Zhu, L., Jaganathan, K., and Hartman, S., "The Kerberos Version 5 Generic Security Service Application Program Interface (GSS-API) Mechanism: Version 2", RFC 4121, July 2005, <http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc4121.txt>

[RFC4616] Zeilenga, K., Ed., "The PLAIN Simple Authentication and Security Layer (SASL) Mechanism", RFC 4616, August 2006, <http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc4616.txt>

[RFC822] Crocker, D.H., "Standard for ARPA Internet Text Messages", STD 11, RFC 822, August 1982, <http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc0822.txt>

1.2.2 Informative References

[MSFT-SETIMAP] Microsoft Corporation, "Set-ImapSettings", [http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aa998252\(EXCHG.140\).aspx](http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aa998252(EXCHG.140).aspx)

1.3 Microsoft Implementations

Microsoft Exchange Server 2007

Microsoft Exchange Server 2010

Microsoft Exchange Server 2013

Microsoft Exchange Server 2016

Microsoft Exchange Server 2019

1.4 Standards Support Requirements

The conformance requirements for [\[RFC1939\]](#) and [\[RFC2449\]](#) are that all required portions of the specifications are implemented according to the specification, and any optional portions that are implemented are implemented according to the specification.

The following table lists the sections of [\[RFC1939\]](#) that are considered normative and the sections that are considered informative.

Section(s)	Normative/Informative
1 - 2	Informative
3 - 7	Normative
8 - 11	Informative
12	Normative
13 - 15	Informative

The following table lists the sections of [\[RFC2449\]](#) that are considered normative and the sections that are considered informative.

Section(s)	Normative/Informative
1	Informative
2 - 9	Normative
10 - 11	Informative
12	Normative
13 - 14	Informative

1.5 Notation

The following notations are used to identify clarifications in section [2.2](#):

Notation	Explanation
C####	This notation identifies a clarification of ambiguity in the target specification. This includes imprecise statements, omitted information, discrepancies, and errata. This does not include data formatting clarifications.
V####	This notation identifies an intended point of variability in the target specification such as the use of MAY, SHOULD, or RECOMMENDED. This does not include extensibility points.
E####	Because the use of extensibility points, such as optional implementation-specific data, could impair interoperability, this notation identifies such points in the target specification.

2 Standards Support Statements

2.1 Normative Variations

The following subsections detail the normative variations from [\[RFC1939\]](#).

2.1.1 [RFC1939] Section 3, Separation by SPACE Character

The specification states: "Keywords and arguments are each separated by a single SPACE character".

Microsoft Exchange Server separates keywords and arguments by one or more SPACE characters, or one or more TAB characters.

2.1.2 [RFC1939] Section 3, Argument Length

The specification states: "Each argument may be up to 40 characters long."

Microsoft Exchange does not validate the length of each argument. Instead, a default maximum command length of 512 octets is enforced. The maximum command length of any value can be modified by using Exchange management tools.

2.1.3 [RFC1939] Section 4, Exclusive-Access Lock on Maildrop

The specification states: "The POP3 server then acquires an exclusive-access lock on the maildrop, as necessary to prevent messages from being modified or removed before the session enters the UPDATE state. If the lock is successfully acquired, the POP3 server responds with a positive status indicator."

Microsoft Exchange does not acquire an exclusive-access lock on the maildrop once a user successfully logs on.

2.1.4 [RFC1939] Section 5, Maildrop Size Returned by STAT Command

The specification states: "The positive response consists of "+OK" followed by a single space, the number of messages in the maildrop, a single space, and the size of the maildrop in octets."

By default, Microsoft Exchange does not calculate the exact size of the maildrop in octets. Instead, the size is calculated based on the amount of storage the message actually occupies in storage. Microsoft Exchange exposes a custom server setting, *EnableExactRFC822Size*, to enable size calculation based on the exact MIME size. For more information about the *EnableExactRFC822Size* parameter, see [\[MSFT-SETIMAP\]](#).

2.1.5 [RFC1939] Section 5, Message Size Returned by LIST Command

The specification states: "All POP3 servers are required to use a certain format for scan listings. A scan listing consists of the message-number of the message, followed by a single space and the exact size of the message in octets."

By default, Microsoft Exchange does not calculate the exact size of the message in octets. Instead, the size is calculated based on the amount of storage the message actually occupies in storage. Microsoft Exchange exposes a custom server setting, *EnableExactRFC822Size*, to enable size calculation based on the exact MIME size. For more information about the *EnableExactRFC822Size* parameter, see [\[MSFT-SETIMAP\]](#).

2.2 Clarifications

The following subsections identify clarifications relative to [\[RFC1939\]](#) and [\[RFC2449\]](#).

Additional Exchange POP3 extensions to [RFC1939] are as specified in [\[MS-OXPOP3\]](#).

2.2.1 [RFC1939] Section 3, Basic Operation

E0001:

The specification states: "Initially, the server host starts the POP3 service by listening on **TCP** port 110. When a client host wishes to make use of the service, it establishes a TCP connection with the server host."

Microsoft Exchange Server 2007, Microsoft Exchange Server 2010, Microsoft Exchange Server 2013, Microsoft Exchange Server 2016, Microsoft Exchange Server 2019

By default, the Exchange POP3 server listens on TCP Port 110 (995 for **SSL**). However, the port bindings can be configured to any port by using Exchange management tools.

C0001:

The specification states: "Responses may be up to 512 characters long, including the terminating CRLF."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange responses are a maximum of 512 characters long, including the terminating CRLF.

C0002:

The specification states: "Once the TCP connection has been opened and the POP3 server has sent the greeting, the session enters the AUTHORIZATION state. In this state, the client must identify itself to the POP3 server."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

The client **MUST** identify itself to the server after it has received the greeting.

V0001:

The specification states: "There is no general method for a client to distinguish between a server which does not implement an optional command and a server which is unwilling or unable to process the command."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange includes informational text after some negative responses to assist the client in determining the cause of the negative response.

V0002:

The specification states: "A POP3 server **MAY** have an inactivity autologout timer. Such a timer **MUST** be of at least 10 minutes' duration. The receipt of any command from the client during that interval should suffice to reset the autologout timer."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange implements two inactivity timers. The authenticated timeout, which applies to sessions that are successfully authenticated, is set to 1,800 seconds by default. The unauthenticated timeout, which applies to unauthenticated sessions, is set to 60 seconds by default. The receipt of any

command is sufficient to reset the inactivity timer. Both of these timeout values can be modified by using the Exchange Management tools.

V0003:

The specification states: "When the timer expires, the session does NOT enter the UPDATE state--the server should close the TCP connection without removing any messages or sending any response to the client."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

In the event of inactivity autologout, Microsoft Exchange sends a response that notifies the client that the connection is being closed, prior to closing the connection.

2.2.2 [RFC1939] Section 4, The AUTHORIZATION State

C0003:

The specification states: "The client must now identify and authenticate itself to the POP3 server."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

The client MUST now identify and authenticate itself to Microsoft Exchange.

E0002:

The specification states: "While there is no single authentication mechanism that is required of all POP3 servers, a POP3 server must of course support at least one authentication mechanism."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange supports the following authentication mechanisms:

- NTLM, as specified in [\[MS-NLMP\]](#), with the POP3 extensions to NTLM, as specified in [\[MS-OXPOP3\]](#).
- GSS-API authentication, as specified in [\[RFC4121\]](#).
- PLAIN authentication, as specified in [\[RFC4616\]](#).
- USER/PASS authentication, as specified in [\[RFC1939\]](#).

C0004:

The specification states: "Once the POP3 server has determined through the use of any authentication command that the client should be given access to the appropriate maildrop, the POP3 server then acquires an exclusive-access lock on the maildrop, as necessary to prevent messages from being modified or removed before the session enters the UPDATE state."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Once the POP3 server has determined through the use of any authentication command that the client MUST be given access to the appropriate maildrop, the POP3 server makes a snapshot of the list of messages on the maildrop and ignores any additions, changes, or deletes in the maildrop caused by other Exchange components while the POP session is opened. If a message is deleted while the POP session is opened, the RETR and TOP commands will return an error.

C0005:

The specification states: "After returning a negative status indicator, the server may close the connection."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

After returning a negative status indicator, Microsoft Exchange can close the connection.

2.2.3 [RFC1939] Section 5, STAT Command

V0004:

The specification states: "This memo makes no requirement on what follows the maildrop size. Minimal implementations should just end that line of the response with a CRLF pair. More advanced implementations may include other information."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange does not return any additional information after the mailbox size (in octets).

2.2.4 [RFC1939] Section 5, LIST Command

V0005:

The specification states: "This memo makes no requirement on what follows the message size in the scan listing. Minimal implementations should just end that line of the response with a CRLF pair. More advanced implementations may include other information, as parsed from the message."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange does not return any additional information after the message size (in octets).

2.2.5 [RFC1939] Section 6, QUIT Command

V0006:

The specification states: "If there is an error, such as a resource shortage, encountered while removing messages, the maildrop may result in having some or none of the messages marked as deleted be removed. In no case may the server remove any messages not marked as deleted."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

In the event of an error in the UPDATE phase, Microsoft Exchange is non-atomic in that it does not ensure that all messages marked as deleted are actually removed. There is no case in which Microsoft Exchange removes any messages not marked as deleted.

2.2.6 [RFC1939] Section 7, TOP Command

C0006:

The specification states: "The POP3 commands discussed above must be supported by all minimal implementations of POP3 servers."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

The server MUST support all the commands discussed above.

V0007:

The specification states that the TOP command is an optional POP3 command.

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Exchange POP3 implements the TOP command.

2.2.7 [RFC1939] Section 7, UIDL Command

C0007:

The specification states: "The unique-id of a message is an arbitrary server-determined string, consisting of one to 70 characters in the range 0x21 to 0x7E, which uniquely identifies a message within a maildrop and which persists across sessions."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange uses decimal integers for the unique-id of messages. The unique-ids increase in value but are not necessarily contiguous.

C0008:

The specification states: "The server should never reuse a unique-id in a given maildrop, for as long as the entity using the unique-id exists."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange does not reuse unique-id values, even after a message has been deleted.

C0009:

The specification states: "While it is generally preferable for server implementations to store arbitrarily assigned unique-ids in the maildrop, this specification is intended to permit unique-ids to be calculated as a hash of the message. Clients should be able to handle a situation where two identical copies of a message in a maildrop have the same unique-id."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange uses non-repeating, monotonically increasing decimal numbers as unique-ids; therefore, clients will not encounter two identical copies of a message with the same unique-id. If messages were carried over from an Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 server, their unique-ids remain in the Exchange 2003 format, which is different from the format used by Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, and Exchange 2019.

2.2.8 [RFC1939] Section 7, USER Command

V0008:

The specification states: "If the POP3 server responds with a negative status indicator ("-ERR") to the USER command, then the client may either issue a new authentication command or may issue the QUIT command."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange does not return a negative status to the USER command because Microsoft Exchange does not verify whether the specified mailbox exists until the client issues the PASS command.

V0009:

The specification states: "The server may return a positive response even though no such mailbox exists."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

As a security precaution, Microsoft Exchange returns a positive status regardless of whether the specified mailbox exists.

V0010:

The specification states: "The server may return a negative response if mailbox exists, but does not permit plaintext password authentication."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange returns a negative response if the mailbox exists, but the server does not permit plaintext password authentication.

2.2.9 [RFC1939] Section 7, PASS Command

C0010:

The specification states: "When the client issues the PASS command, the POP3 server uses the argument pair from the USER and PASS commands to determine if the client should be given access to the appropriate maildrop."

Exchange 2007

If the user is not in the same site as the Client Access server to which the client is connected, Microsoft Exchange sends a login failed error to the user.

V0011:

The specification states: "Since the PASS command has exactly one argument, a POP3 server may treat spaces in the argument as part of the password, instead of as argument separators."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange allows unquoted spaces in the PASS argument, and uses the entire remainder of the command as a single password argument.

2.2.10 [RFC1939] Section 7, APOP Command

V0012:

The specification states that the APOP command is an optional POP3 command.

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange does not support the APOP command.

2.2.11 [RFC1939] Section 8, Scaling and Operational Considerations

E0003:

The specification states: "Imposing a per-user maildrop storage quota or the like."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange mailboxes can be configured to have a storage quota. Each user mailbox has a storage quota that is inherited from the storage database configuration. Storage quotas for each mailbox can be changed using the Exchange Management tools.

E0004:

The specification states: "Sites which choose this option should be sure to inform users of impending or current exhaustion of quota, perhaps by inserting an appropriate message into the user's maildrop."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Exchange management tools can be used to configure on a per-mailbox basis to warn users that are near their maximum mailbox size.

E0005:

The specification states: "Sites are free to establish local policy regarding the storage and retention of messages on the server, both read and unread. For example, a site might delete unread messages from the server after 60 days and delete read messages after 7 days."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

Microsoft Exchange supports a limited retention policy that can be configured to auto-delete mailbox items based on age. However, this feature is exposed as part of the Exchange storage facility and is not a POP3-specific feature.

2.2.12 [RFC1939] Section 11, Message Format

C0011:

The specification states: "All messages transmitted during a POP3 session are assumed to conform to the standard for the format of Internet text messages [\[RFC822\]](#)."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

All messages transmitted during a POP3 session MUST conform to the standard for the format of Internet text messages [\[RFC822\]](#).

2.2.13 [RFC2449] Section 4, Maximum Length of Command

E0006:

The specification states: "The maximum length of a command is increased from 47 characters (4 character command, single space, 40 character argument, CRLF) to 255 octets, including the terminating CRLF."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

By default, the maximum length of a command is 47 bytes in Exchange 2007 and 512 bytes in Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, and Exchange 2019. The Set-PopSettings cmdlet - MaxCommandSize parameter can be used to set the maximum length of a command in Microsoft Exchange. The minimum size is 40 bytes, the maximum size is 1024 bytes.

2.2.14 [RFC2449] Section 4, Commands Up To 255 Octets

E0007:

The specification states: "Servers which support the CAPA command MUST support commands up to 255 octets. Servers MUST also support the largest maximum command length specified by any supported capability."

Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, Exchange 2019

By default, the maximum length of a command is 47 bytes in Exchange 2007 and 512 bytes in Exchange 2010, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2016, and Exchange 2019. The Set-PopSettings cmdlet – MaxCommandSize parameter can be used to set the maximum length of a command in Microsoft Exchange. The minimum size is 40 bytes, the maximum size is 1024 bytes.

2.3 Error Handling

There are no additional error handling considerations beyond those discussed in sections [2.2.5](#) and [2.2.9](#).

2.4 Security

There are no additional security considerations beyond those discussed in section [2.2.8](#).

3 Change Tracking

This section identifies changes that were made to this document since the last release. Changes are classified as Major, Minor, or None.

The revision class **Major** means that the technical content in the document was significantly revised. Major changes affect protocol interoperability or implementation. Examples of major changes are:

- A document revision that incorporates changes to interoperability requirements.
- A document revision that captures changes to protocol functionality.

The revision class **Minor** means that the meaning of the technical content was clarified. Minor changes do not affect protocol interoperability or implementation. Examples of minor changes are updates to clarify ambiguity at the sentence, paragraph, or table level.

The revision class **None** means that no new technical changes were introduced. Minor editorial and formatting changes may have been made, but the relevant technical content is identical to the last released version.

The changes made to this document are listed in the following table. For more information, please contact dochelp@microsoft.com.

Section	Description	Revision class
All	Updated supported products throughout document.	Major
1.3 Microsoft Implementations	Updated list of products.	Major

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