

## IEEE Standards Interpretation for IEEE Std 1003.1™-2001 IEEE Standard Standard for Information Technology -- Portable Operating System Interface (POSIX®)

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### Interpretation Request #100

**Topic:** tail -c 0, -n 0 **Relevant Sections:** XCU tail

The standard does not explicitly specify what happens if the “number” argument to the -c or -n option is 0. Historical implementations have handled this differently depending on whether the -f option was also given or not; “tail -0” usually resulted in no output at all, but “tail -0f” usually resulted in a dump of the complete file after a delay of one second. Some implementations have followed this for “tail -n 0” and “tail -f -n 0”, some have not.

#### Action:

Either behavior may have been considered useful by application writers, so the standard might break existing applications if the behavior is not made implementation-defined. On the other hand, a perfectly defined way to make tail output all file contents before waiting with -f would be “tail -f -c +1”, so it could also be decided that “tail -f -n 0” must not output any data initially.

### Interpretation Response

The standard clearly states the requirements for the tail utility, and conforming implementations must conform to this. Concerns are being forwarded to the sponsor.

### Rationale for Interpretation

The standard explicitly defines required behavior, except for tail -0f and tail -0, which are unspecified. In particular, tail -n 0 and tail -f -n 0 are clearly specified. Implementations that treat tail -n 0 the same as tail -n +0 are not conforming.