

IEEE Standards Interpretations for IEEE Std 1003.2™-1992 IEEE Standard for Information Technology--Portable Operating System Interfaces (POSIX®)-- Part 2: Shell and Utilities

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Interpretation Request #128

Topic: REs **Relevant Clauses:** 2.8

The standard as written appears to state that "a)b" is a legitimate and conforming ERE, because right parenthesis is special only in the presence of an outstanding unmatched left parenthesis. This is completely inconsistent with historical practice, which has always declared an unmatched right parenthesis to be an error. This change adds no useful functionality, and indeed interferes with certain significant uses of EREs (which depend on parentheses being balanced so that user-supplied EREs can safely be embedded in larger ones by being wrapped in parentheses). Was this change deliberate, or was this an accidental mistake which should be corrected? Should a correction be indicated, the relevant lines in 1003.2-1992 are 3066-3067 and 3221-3222. A suitable correction would be to delete all these lines and add right parenthesis to the list of unconditionally-special characters in line 3062.

Interpretation Response

The standard clearly states the behavior for parentheses in regular expressions, and conforming implementations must conform to this, even if it does not match some historic practices. However, concerns have been raised about this which are being forwarded to the sponsor.

Rationale for Interpretation

None.