White Paper

Archive of MAVEN CDF in PDS4  
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# Overview

In order to support the data format preferred by many of the MAVEN instrument teams, the PDS PPI node has agreed to archive CDF-formatted data files from the MAVEN project. However, in order to meet the needs of the PDS archive the CDF file must meet specific requirements. These requirements will allow the data to be described by PDS metadata and make it accessible to PDS tools and services, while still allowing the MAVEN instrument teams to work with the data using their existing tools.

The Common Data Format (CDF) is widely used in the Heliophysics domain and for data obtained from ground based observatories. It is less commonly used in the planetary domain. However, many international space agencies (i.e. JAXA) and crossover projects (including MAVEN) have adopted CDF as the preferred data format because they have existing infrastructure that relies on the format and due to the broad software support for the format. These groups are seeking or are required to archive their data with the Planetary Data System (PDS). Since CDF is a general and flexible format, files can be constructed in a variety of ways. Adopting a set of "best practices" for constructing a CDF will enable archiving of the data with PDS and reliable generation of alternate forms (i.e. ASCII Tables) of the data. This white paper describes the best practices and the rational for them.

# CDF Specification

Common Data Format (CDF) [1] is a self-describing data format for the storage of scalar and multidimensional data in a platform- and discipline-independent way. The format supports built-in data compression (RLE, gZIP, Huffman). It is has both library and toolkit support on the most commonly used platforms and programming languages. Compressed data is transparently uncompressed when read with the provided libraries and tools. The current release of CDF is Version 3.4 (February 28, 2012) [2].

A CDF file can contain both data and metadata. Data are stored in a CDF file as variables, with metadata stored as attributes. However, its common practice to store some data related metadata in variables. It is possible to assign an attribute to a variable to help in differentiating between data and metadata (See section "Records and Sparse Data"). Typically all variables are stored in a single file, but the CDF specification does allow each variable to be stored in a separate file (multi-file CDF).

It is possible to write the values of variables to a CDF file incrementally. Each write will create a new set of metadata and data. This will cause the data for a variable to spread out (or fragmented) in the CDF. In addition it is possible to mark variables as deleted (unused) without removing the data. Once data is marked as "unused" the metadata describing it is no longer available. A variable may also be "virtual" with the values being determined through a calculation of a formula. The formula is expressed as a text string and is defined by individual projects (or data producers). There are no functions defined in the CDF specification.

# Attributes

In a CDF file there are two types of attributes: global and variable. Global attributes describe aspects of the overall CDF and variable attributes describe features of a variable. An attribute has a name and value. An attribute name must start with a letter and can otherwise contain letters, numbers and the underscore character (no other special characters allowed). An attribute name is case-sensitive. A value can be an array and of any allowed CDF data type.

In the CDF specification there are no pre-defined or required attributes. However, commonly used tools and infrastructure (i.e. CDAWeb) expect certain attributes to be defined. The International Solar-Terrestrial Physics (ISTP) Program [4] defined a set of global and variable attributes which is endorsed by the Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG) [5] and has been widely adopted. There has also been an effort to define an archive suitable version of CDF, referred to as CDF-A, which supports a richer set of metadata based on the Space Physics Archive Search and Extract (SPASE) information model [6].

## Global Attributes

The ISTP/IACG guidelines define the following global attributes:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Project | The name of the project. |
| Discipline | The science discipline and subdiscipline. (enumeration) |
| Data\_type | ISTP defined exchangeable data product type. (enumeration) |
| Descriptor | The name of the instrument or sensor that collected the data. |
| Data\_version | Project assigned version for the data. |
| Instrument\_type | The ISTP defined instrument type. Multi-valued. (enumeration) |
| Logical\_file\_id | The name of the CDF file using the ISTP naming convention. |
| Logical\_source | Source\_name, data\_type, and descriptor information. |
| Logical\_source\_description | Full words associated with the Logical\_source. |
| Mission\_group | The assigned name of the mission or project. (enumeration) |
| PI\_name | First initial and last name of the PI. |
| PI\_affiliation | A recognizable abbreviation of the PI affiliation. |
| Source\_name | The mission or investigation that contains the sensors |
| TEXT | Description of the experiment |

ISTP/IACG also defines the following recommended (optional) attributes:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Generated\_by | The generating data center/group. |
| Generation\_date | Date stamp for the creation of the file. |
| HTTP\_LINK | The URL for the PI or Co-I web site holding on-line data. |
| LINK\_TEXT | Text describing on-line data available at PI or Co-I web sites. |
| LINK\_TITLE | The title of the web site holding on-line data available at PI or Co-I web sites. |
| MODS | History of modifications made to the CDF data set. |
| Parents | The parent CDF(S) for files of derived and merged data sets. |
| Rules\_of\_use | Citability and PI access restrictions. This may point to a World Wide Web page specifying the rules of use. |
| Skeleton\_version | The skeleton file version number. |
| Software\_version | The version of the software that generated the CDF. |
| Time\_resolution | The time resolution of the file. |
| TITLE | A title for the data set. |
| Validate | Written by software for automatic validation of features. |

CDF-A defines the following required attributes:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| spase\_DatasetResourceID | The SPASE ResourceID assigned of the NumericalData resource the data file is part of. |

CDF-A defines the following optional attributes:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| spase\_DatasetResource | The SPASE XML description of the dataset that corresponds to the SPASE ResourceID |
| spase\_GranuleResourceID | The Granule ResourceID assigned to the data file. |
| spase\_GranuleResource | The SPASE XML description of the dataset that corresponds to the SPASE Granule ResourceID |

## Variable Names

CDF allows variable names to be composed from the "ASCII Character Set". While the ASCII Character set includes non-printable characters, it appears that the intention was printable characters in the ASCII character set. The ISTP/IACG specification restricts CDF Variable names to contain only letters, numbers and the underscore. ISTP/IACG further specifies that a variable name must begin with a letter.

## Variable Attributes

CDF tools require (expect) the following variable attributes

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| FORMAT | A Fortran or C format specification that is used when displaying a variable value. |
| VALIDMIN | The minimum valid value for a variable. |
| VALIDMAX | The maximum valid value for a variable. |
| FILLVAL | The value used for missing or invalid variable values. |
| MONOTON | The monotonicity of a variable: INCREASE (strictly increasing values), DECREASE (strictly decreasing values), or FALSE (not monotonic). |
| SCALEMIN | The minimum value for scaling a variable when graphically displaying its values. |
| SCALEMAX | The maximum value for scaling a variable when graphically displaying its values. In the description of each CDF toolkit program, the special attributes that may affect that program's operation are defined. Note that most of the CDF toolkit programs can be instructed to ignore these special attributes. |

In addition, the ISTP/IACG requires the following attributes:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| CATDESC | Approximately 80-character string which is a textual description of the variable |
| DEPEND\_i | Ties a dimensional data variable to a support\_data variable. Contains the name of the variable. "i" is replaced with the index of the dimension. For ISTP the DEPEND\_0 must be defined and have the value 'Epoch'. |
| DISPLAY\_TYPE | what type of plot to make (i.e. time\_series, spectrogram, stack\_plot,image) |
| FIELDNAM | A description of the variable (up to 30 characters). |
| FORM\_PTR | A variable which stores the name of the variable that contains the FORMAT string. To be used only if FORMAT is not present. |
| LABLAXIS/LABL\_PTR\_i | The label for the y-axis of a plot or to provide a heading for a data listing. If labeling a variable with dimensions use the LABL\_PTR\_i form with "i" replaced with the index of the dimension. |
| UNITS/UNIT\_PTR | The units of the variable. In the UNIT\_PTR form it contains the name of the variable which stores the UNITS string. To be used only if UNITS is not present. |
| VAR\_TYPE | Identifies a variable as either data, support\_data, metadata or ignore\_data. |

ISTP/IACG also defines the following recommended (optional) attributes:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| AVG\_TYPE | Identifies the technique used for averaging the data. |
| DELTA\_PLUS\_VAR | The positive uncertainty in (range of) the original variable's value. |
| DELTA\_MINUS\_VAR | The negative uncertainty in (range of) the original variable's value. |
| DERIVN | The derivation of the variable, possibly including a function/algorithm name or journal reference. |
| DICT\_KEY | The ISTP/IACG dictionary keyword that describes the variable. |
| MONOTON | Whether the variable is monotonically increasing or monotonically decreasing. A value of INCREASE indicates strictly increasing values, DECREASE strictly decreasing values, or FALSE indicates not monotonic. |
| SCALETYP | Whether the variable should have a linear or a log scale as a default. |
| SCAL\_PTR | The name of the variable containing SCALETYP for multidimensional data. |
| sig\_digits | the number of significant digits or other measure of data accuracy |
| SI\_conversion | The conversion factor to SI units. |
| VAR\_NOTES | Ancillary information about the variable. |
| V\_PARENT | The "attached" variable which stores the parent variable(s) of a derived variable. |

# Records and Sparse Data

A CDF can have one or more records. Each record is a set of variable arrays. The variable arrays in each record are generally related to each other in some way (i.e. time), but this not required in the CDF specification. For time varying data ISTP/IACG requires the time value associated with each record be stored in the variable with the name 'Epoch' and is attached to all time varying data variables via DEPEND\_0. Furthermore, 'EPOCH' should be the first variable in each CDF data file. The ISTP/IACG guidelines also recommend the following names and purpose for variables:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Quality Flag | Quality or status flag for each record. |
| Time\_PB5 | Alternate representation of time in the format YEAR (4 digit), DAY OF YEAR (note: January 1 is Day 1), and MSEC OF DAY (elapsed ms). |
| Post Gap Flag | An indication of the reason for a gap. Appears in the record following the gap. |

CDF supports all the common data types (single byte; character; 1, 2, 4, and 8 byte integers; 4 and 8 bytes floating point; and special 8 and 16 byte time). ISTP/IACG limits data values to integer and real, with character data allowed for metadata or support data (for example, labels).

In a single-file CDF a variable can be specified as having sparse records. When using sparse records, a value is physically stored only when the value changes. When the data are read the "virtual" records can either be filled with the defined pad value or with the last known (physical) value. If a variable does have sparse records the internal (CDF binary record) sparse records attribute must be set to either PAD\_SPARSERECORDS or PREV\_SPARSERECORDS.

In a CDF file, variables which maintain the same value from record to record do not have to be physically stored in a CDF file. A repeating value may be stored once in the CDF with metadata indicating how the variable is to be replicated by software. If the variable has the internal (CDF) record variance attribute of "VARY" then a value may change from record to record.

# Physical Layout

A CDF file is a sequentially written set of alternating blocks of metadata and data with a block of global metadata at the beginning of the file and another at end of the file. The structure, encoding and storage order for a block of data is defined in the preceding block of metadata. The CDF specification refers to these blocks as "records".

# Other Features

Starting with Version 3.2 an MD5 checksum can be stored at the end of the CDF file following the last record of the CDF file. It is calculated on the CDF content of the file can only be used to ensure the integrity of a CDF content. The MD5 Checksum is not included in the internal value for the length of the CDF. The MD5 Checksum is calculated on the CDF content (all bytes up to, but not including the MD5 checksum appended to the end of the file).

Prior to version 3.0 a CDF file could not be larger than 2G bytes. Starting with version 3.0 this limit is removed. Version 3.1 and later is backward compatible with version 2.7.2 and earlier.

# PDS4 Archive Requirements

The Planetary Data System (PDS) has a mandate to preserve NASA planetary science data for a period of 200 years (based upon US Federal records preservation rules). PDS seeks to insure that the data are not only preserved over that period, but that sufficient information is provided to make the data accessible to data users that may not have access to any pre-existing readers or software tools. As a result PDS metadata is designed to describe the physical storage structure of the data. PDS prefers transparent, non-proprietary formats when archiving data. Data should be in a form which can be read using the accompanying plain text, PDS metadata. Once read, the data should be usable without additional processing. The PDS4 information model supports describing a variety of storage structures which includes arrays and tabular data.

# Requirements for Archivable CDF files

1. Create CDF compliant with version 3.2 or later.
2. MSB (Network) encoding for all values (MSB is used for internal CDF information).
3. Include CDF Tool compliant metadata.
4. Include ISTP/IACG compliant metadata.
5. Use single file CDF.
6. No compression (file or variable).
7. No fragmented variables (all data for a variable must be contiguous in the file).
8. No sparse variables. All data values are physical (data for all dimensions in a variable are written)
9. No unused records. (No superfluous, non-decodable records)
10. Use only "zVariables"  
    "rVariables" are not recommended by the CDF standard and should be considered deprecated. Also, multiple variable reads can be performed only if variables are of the same type.
11. No virtual (calculated) variables.
12. All data records are physical (record variance for data variables is "VARY")

# Labeling CDF files with PDS4

If the CDF file conforms to the archive requirements it is possible to create a PDS4 label to describe the contents of the CDF. Within the PDS4 label each variable will be described as an appropriately dimensioned array. In addition, much of metadata contained in the CDF file will be replicated in the appropriate elements in the PDS4 label to provide a rich set of PDS4 accessible information.

# Appendix A

# CDF Tools and Libraries.

CDF is supported on the following platforms:

* DEC Alpha/OSF1 & OpenVMS
* DECstation/ULTRIX & VMS
* HP 9000 series/HP-UX
* PC Windows NT/2000/XP/Vista/Windows 7, Linux, Solaris, Cygwin, MinGW & QN X
* IBM RS600 series/AIX
* Macintosh OS X 10.3 or a later version
* NeXT/Mach
* SGI Iris, Power series and Indigo/IRIX
* Sun/SunOS & SOLARIS

CDF libraries are available for the following programming languages:

* C
* C#
* Fortran
* Java
* Perl

Support Format Transforms

* MakeCDF (reads flat data sets, in both binary and text)
* CDF-to-netCDF (Only supporting netCDF V3.\*)
* CDF-to-FITS
* CDF-to-ASCII (Text dump of a CDF file)
* CDF-to-CDF Skeleton table
* CDF-to-CDFML (XML representation of CDF)
* CDFML-to-CDF
* netCDF-to-CDF (Only supporting netCDF V3.\*)
* FITS-to-CDF
* HDF4-to-CDF
* HDF5-to-CDF (HDF5 in text dump to CDF. To be provided upon request)

Supported Analsyis Environments:

IDL:

MATLAB

Tools

**CDFedit**: Allows the display and/or modification contents of a CDF.

**CDFexport**: Write the contents of a CDF to the terminal screen, a text file, or another CDF.

**CDFconvert**: Change format, version, encoding, compression, sparseness and checksum.

**CDFcompare**: Displays the differences between two CDFs

**CDFstats**: Produces a statistical report on a CDF's variable data.

**CDFinquire**: Displays the version of the CDF distribution being used.

**CDFdir**: Display a directory listing of a CDF's files.

**CDFmerge**: Merge two or more CDF files into a single file.

**CDFdump**: Display or extract the contents of a CDF file to a screen (default) or text file.

**CDFirsdump**: displays the statistics of CDF Internal Records (IRs).

**CDFvalidate**: optionally performs sanity checks on data in the CDF files.

**CDFleapsecondsinfo**: Displays the information of the leap seconds table that the CDF uses.

**SkeletonTable**: create an ASCII text file containing information about a CDF.

**SkeletonCDF**: Make a fully structured CDF, by reading a structured information in a text file.

# Data Types

Integer Data Types

CDF\_BYTE 1-byte, signed integer.

CDF\_INT1 1-byte, signed integer.

CDF\_UINT1 1-byte, unsigned integer.

CDF\_INT2 2-byte, signed integer.

CDF\_UINT2 2-byte, unsigned integer.

CDF\_INT4 4-byte, signed integer.

CDF\_UINT4 4-byte, unsigned integer.

CDF\_INT8 8-byte, signed integer.

Floating Point Data Types

CDF\_REAL4 & CDF\_FLOAT 4-byte, single-precision floating-point.

CDF\_REAL8 & CDF\_DOUBLE 8-byte, double-precision floating-point.

Character Data Types (Limited to ASCII set of characters)

CDF\_CHAR 1-byte, character.

CDF\_UCHAR 1-byte, unsigned character.

EPOCH Data Types (milliseconds since 01-Jan-0000 00:00:00.000)

CDF\_EPOCH 8-byte, double precision floating point.

CDF\_EPOCH16 two 8-byte, double precision floating point.

TT2000 Data Types (milliseconds since 2000-01-01T12:00:00.000000000, aka J2000. w/ leap seconds)

CDF\_TIME\_TT2000 8-byte, signed integer

# Encoding

Run-Length Encoding, Huffman, Adaptive Huffman, GZIP

# Special Attributes

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| FORMAT | A Fortran or C format specification that is used when displaying a variable value. |
| VALIDMIN | The minimum valid value for a variable. |
| VALIDMAX | The maximum valid value for a variable. |
| FILLVAL | The value used for missing or invalid variable values. |
| MONOTON | The monotonicity of a variable: INCREASE (strictly increasing values), DECREASE (strictly decreasing values), or FALSE (not monotonic). Monotonicity only applies to NRV variables that vary along one dimension and RV variables that vary along no dimensions. |
| SCALEMIN | The minimum value for scaling a variable when graphically displaying its values. |
| SCALEMAX | The maximum value for scaling a variable when graphically displaying its values. In the description of each CDF toolkit program, the special attributes that may affect that program's operation are defined. Note that most of the CDF toolkit programs can be instructed to ignore these special attributes. |

# References

[1] CDF Internal Format Description; Version 3.4, February 28, 2012; Space Physics Data Facility; NASA / Goddard Space Flight Center. <http://cdaweb.gsfc.nasa.gov/pub/software/cdf/doc/cdf34/cdf34ifd.pdf>

[2] CDF User's Guide; Version 3.4, February 28, 2012; Space Physics Data Facility; NASA / Goddard Space Flight Center. <http://cdaweb.gsfc.nasa.gov/pub/software/cdf/doc/cdf34/cdf34ug.pdf>

[3] ISTP/IACG guidelines for CDF, <http://spdf.gsfc.nasa.gov/istp_guide/istp_guide.html>

[4] International Solar Terrestrial Physics (ISTP), <http://pwg.gsfc.nasa.gov/istp/>

[5] Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG), <http://www.iacg.org/>

[6] Space Physics Archive Search and Extract (SPASE), <http://www.spase-group.org/>

[7] COSPAR Panel on Radiation Belt Environment Modeling (PRBEM) http://craterre.onecert.fr/prbem/Standard\_File\_Format.pdf