

Understanding IP Addressing: Everything You Ever Wanted To Know

Class C
Prefix -Length
Class A
All-1s
CIDR
Network-Prefix
/24
Subnetting
Mask
All-0s
Supernetting
Longest Match
Classful
Extended-Network Prefix
/8
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VLSM
/16
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Class B

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Introduction

In the mid-1990's, the Internet is a dramatically different network than when it was first established in the early 1980's. Today, the Internet has entered the public consciousness as the world's largest public data network, doubling in size every nine months. This is reflected in the tremendous popularity of the World Wide Web (WWW), the opportunities that businesses see in reaching customers from virtual storefronts, and the emergence of new types and methods of doing business. It is clear that expanding business and social awareness will continue to increase public demand for access to resources on the Internet.

There is a direct relationship between the value of the Internet and the number of sites connected to the Internet. As the Internet grows, the value of each site's connection to the Internet increases because it provides the organization with access to an ever expanding user/customer population.

Internet Scaling Problems

Over the past few years, the Internet has experienced two major scaling issues as it has struggled to provide continuous and uninterrupted growth:

- The eventual exhaustion of the IPv4 address space
- The ability to route traffic between the ever increasing number of networks that comprise the Internet

The first problem is concerned with the eventual depletion of the IP address space. The current version of IP, IP version 4 (IPv4), defines a 32-bit address which means that there are only 2^{32} (4,294,967,296) IPv4 addresses available. This might seem like a large number of addresses, but as new markets open and a significant portion of the world's population becomes candidates for IP addresses, the finite number of IP addresses will eventually be exhausted.

The address shortage problem is aggravated by the fact that portions of the IP address space have not been efficiently allocated. Also, the traditional model of classful addressing does not allow the address space to be used to its maximum potential. The Address Lifetime Expectancy (ALE) Working Group of the IETF has expressed concerns that if the current address allocation policies are not modified, the Internet will experience a near to medium term exhaustion of its unallocated address pool. If the Internet's address supply problem is not solved, new users may be unable to connect to the global Internet!

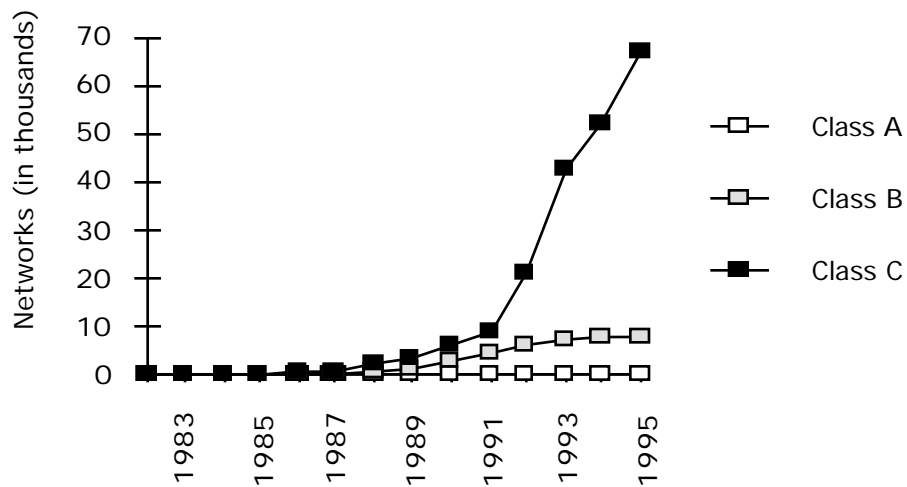


Figure 1: Assigned and Allocated Network Numbers

The second problem is caused by the rapid growth in the size of the Internet routing tables. Internet backbone routers are required to maintain complete routing information for the Internet. Over recent years, routing tables have experienced exponential growth as increasing numbers of organizations connect to the Internet - in December 1990 there were 2,190 routes, in December 1992 there were 8,500 routes, and in December 1995 there were 30,000+ routes.

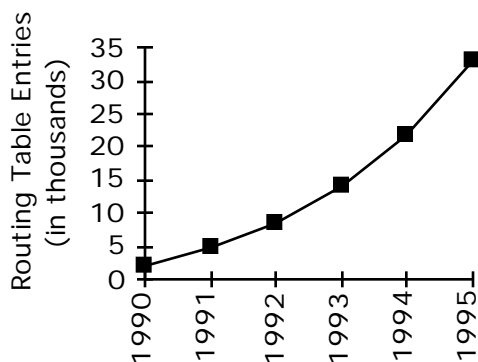


Figure 2: Growth of Internet Routing Tables

Unfortunately, the routing problem cannot be solved by simply installing more router memory and increasing the size of the routing tables. Other factors related to the capacity problem include the growing demand for CPU horsepower to compute routing table/topology changes, the increasingly dynamic nature of WWW connections and their effect on router forwarding caches, and the sheer volume of information that needs to be managed by people and machines. If the number of entries in the global routing table is allowed to increase without bounds, core routers will be forced to drop routes and portions of the Internet will become unreachable!

The long term solution to these problems can be found in the widespread deployment of IP Next Generation (IPng or IPv6) towards the turn of the century. However, while the Internet community waits for IPng, IPv4 will need to be patched and modified so that the Internet can continue to provide the universal connectivity we have come to expect. This patching process may cause a tremendous amount of pain and may alter some of our fundamental concepts about the Internet.

Classful IP Addressing

When IP was first standardized in September 1981, the specification required that each system attached to an IP-based internet be assigned a unique, 32-bit Internet address value. Some systems, such as routers which have interfaces to more than one network, must be assigned a unique IP address for each network interface.

The first part of an Internet address identifies the network on which the host resides, while the second part identifies the particular host on the given network. This created the two-level addressing hierarchy which is illustrated in Figure 3.

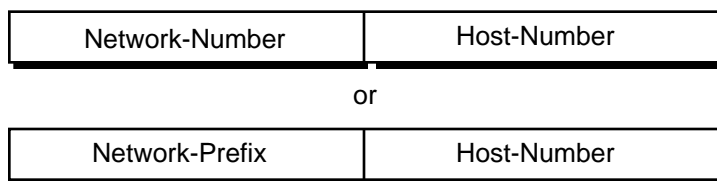


Figure 3: Two-Level Internet Address Structure

In recent years, the network-number field has been referred to as the "network-prefix" because the leading portion of each IP address identifies the network number. All hosts on a given network share the same network-prefix but must have a unique host-number. Similarly, any two hosts on different networks must have different network-prefixes but may have the same host-number.

Primary Address Classes

In order to provide the flexibility required to support different size networks, the designers decided that the IP address space should be divided into three different address classes - Class A, Class B, and Class C. This is often referred to as "classful" addressing because the address space is split into three predefined classes, groupings, or categories. Each class fixes the boundary between the network-prefix and the host-number at a different point within the 32-bit address. The formats of the fundamental address classes are illustrated in Figure 4.

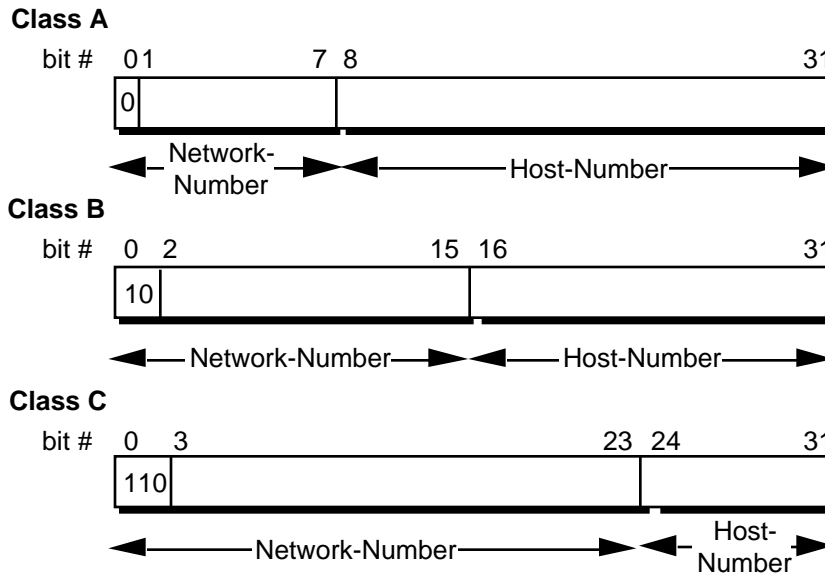


Figure 4: Principle Classful IP Address Formats

One of the fundamental features of classful IP addressing is that each address contains a self-encoding key that identifies the dividing point between the network-prefix and the host-number. For example, if the first two bits of an IP address are 1-0, the dividing point falls between the 15th and 16th bits. This simplified the routing system during the early years of the Internet because the original routing protocols did not supply a "deciphering key" or "mask" with each route to identify the length of the network-prefix.

Class A Networks (/8 Prefixes)

Each Class A network address has an 8-bit network-prefix with the highest order bit set to 0 and a seven-bit network number, followed by a 24-bit host-number. Today, it is no longer considered 'modern' to refer to a Class A network. Class A networks are now referred to as "/8s" (pronounced "slash eight" or just "eights") since they have an 8-bit network-prefix.

A maximum of 126 (2^7-2) /8 networks can be defined. The calculation requires that the 2 is subtracted because the /8 network 0.0.0.0 is reserved for use as the default route and the /8 network 127.0.0.0 (also written 127/8 or 127.0.0.0/8) has been reserved for the "loopback" function. Each /8 supports a maximum of 16,777,214 ($2^{24}-2$) hosts per network. The host calculation requires that 2 is subtracted because the all-0s ("this network") and all-1s ("broadcast") host-numbers may not be assigned to individual hosts.

Since the /8 address block contains 2^{31} (2,147,483,648) individual addresses and the IPv4 address space contains a maximum of 2^{32} (4,294,967,296) addresses, the /8 address space is 50% of the total IPv4 unicast address space.

Class B Networks (/16 Prefixes)

Each Class B network address has a 16-bit network-prefix with the two highest order bits set to 1-0 and a 14-bit network number, followed by a 16-bit host-number. Class B networks are now referred to as "/16s" since they have a 16-bit network-prefix.

A maximum of 16,384 (2^{14}) /16 networks can be defined with up to 65,534 ($2^{16}-2$) hosts per network. Since the entire /16 address block contains 2^{30} (1,073,741,824) addresses, it represents 25% of the total IPv4 unicast address space.

Class C Networks (/24 Prefixes)

Each Class C network address has a 24-bit network-prefix with the three highest order bits set to 1-1-0 and a 21-bit network number, followed by an 8-bit host-number. Class C networks are now referred to as "/24s" since they have a 24-bit network-prefix.

A maximum of 2,097,152 (2^{21}) /24 networks can be defined with up to 254 (2^8-2) hosts per network. Since the entire /24 address block contains 2^{29} (536,870,912) addresses, it represents 12.5% (or 1/8th) of the total IPv4 unicast address space.

Other Classes

In addition to the three most popular classes, there are two additional classes. Class D addresses have their leading four-bits set to 1-1-1-0 and are used to support IP Multicasting. Class E addresses have their leading four-bits set to 1-1-1-1 and are reserved for experimental use.

Dotted-Decimal Notation

To make Internet addresses easier for human users to read and write, IP addresses are often expressed as four decimal numbers, each separated by a dot. This format is called "dotted-decimal notation."

Dotted-decimal notation divides the 32-bit Internet address into four 8-bit (byte) fields and specifies the value of each field independently as a decimal number with the fields separated by dots. Figure 5 shows how a typical /16 (Class B) Internet address can be expressed in dotted decimal notation.

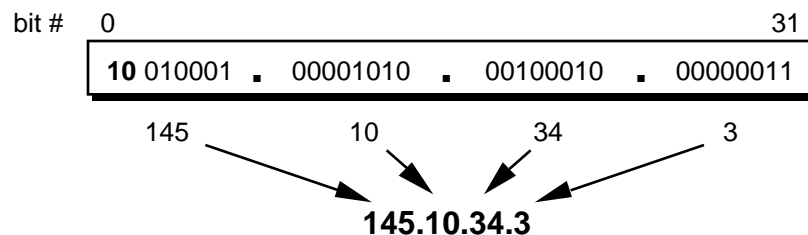


Figure 5: Dotted-Decimal Notation

Table 1 displays the range of dotted-decimal values that can be assigned to each of the three principle address classes. The "xxx" represents the host-number field of the address which is assigned by the local network administrator.

Table 1: Dotted-Decimal Ranges for Each Address Class

Address Class	Dotted-Decimal Notation Ranges
A (/8 prefixes)	1.xxx.xxx.xxx through 126.xxx.xxx.xxx
B (/16 prefixes)	128.0.xxx.xxx through 191.255.xxx.xxx
C (/24 prefixes)	192.0.0.xxx through 223.255.255.xxx

Unforeseen Limitations to Classful Addressing

The original designers never envisioned that the Internet would grow into what it has become today. Many of the problems that the Internet is facing today can be traced back to the early decisions that were made during its formative years.

- During the early days of the Internet, the seemingly unlimited address space allowed IP addresses to be allocated to an organization based on its request rather than its actual need. As a result, addresses were freely assigned to those who asked for them without concerns about the eventual depletion of the IP address space.
- The decision to standardize on a 32-bit address space meant that there were only 2^{32} (4,294,967,296) IPv4 addresses available. A decision to support a slightly larger address space would have exponentially increased the number of addresses thus eliminating the current address shortage problem.
- The classful A, B, and C octet boundaries were easy to understand and implement, but they did not foster the efficient allocation of a finite address space. Problems resulted from the lack of a network class that was designed to support medium-sized organizations. A /24, which supports 254 hosts, is too small while a /16, which supports 65,534 hosts, is too large. In the past, the Internet has assigned sites with several hundred hosts a single /16 address instead of a couple of /24s addresses. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a premature depletion of the /16 network address space. The only readily available addresses for medium-size organizations are /24s which have the potentially negative impact of increasing the size of the global Internet's routing table.

The subsequent history of Internet addressing is focused on a series of steps that overcome these addressing issues and have supported the growth of the global Internet.

Additional Practice with Classful Addressing

Please turn to Appendix B for practical exercises to further your understanding of Classful IP Addressing.

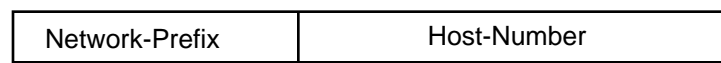
Subnetting

In 1985, RFC 950 defined a standard procedure to support the subnetting, or division, of a single Class A, B, or C network number into smaller pieces. Subnetting was introduced to overcome some of the problems that parts of the Internet were beginning to experience with the classful two-level addressing hierarchy:

- Internet routing tables were beginning to grow.
- Local administrators had to request another network number from the Internet before a new network could be installed at their site.

Both of these problems were attacked by adding another level of hierarchy to the IP addressing structure. Instead of the classful two-level hierarchy, subnetting supports a three-level hierarchy. Figure 6 illustrates the basic idea of subnetting which is to divide the standard classful host-number field into two parts - the subnet-number and the host-number on that subnet.

Two-Level Classful Hierarchy



Three-Level Subnet Hierarchy

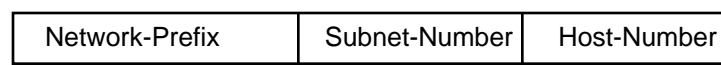


Figure 6: Subnet Address Hierarchy

Subnetting attacked the expanding routing table problem by ensuring that the subnet structure of a network is never visible outside of the organization's private network. The route from the Internet to any subnet of a given IP address is the same, no matter which subnet the destination host is on. This is because all subnets of a given network number use the same network-prefix but different subnet numbers. The routers within the private organization need to differentiate between the individual subnets, but as far as the Internet routers are concerned, all of the subnets in the organization are collected into a single routing table entry. This allows the local administrator to introduce arbitrary complexity into the private network without affecting the size of the Internet's routing tables.

Subnetting overcame the registered number issue by assigning each organization one (or at most a few) network number(s) from the IPv4 address space. The organization was then free to assign a distinct subnetwork number for each of its internal networks. This allows the organization to deploy additional subnets without needing to obtain a new network number from the Internet.

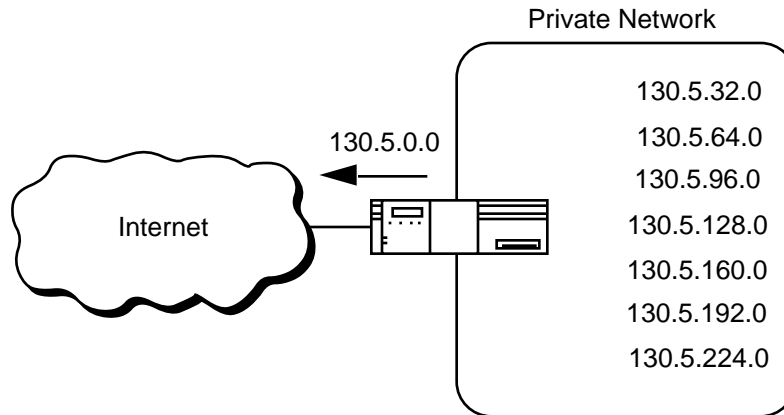


Figure 7: Subnetting Reduces the Routing Requirements of the Internet

In Figure 7, a site with several logical networks uses subnet addressing to cover them with a single /16 (Class B) network address. The router accepts all traffic from the Internet addressed to network 130.5.0.0, and forwards traffic to the interior subnetworks based on the third octet of the classful address. The deployment of subnetting within the private network provides several benefits:

- The size of the global Internet routing table does not grow because the site administrator does not need to obtain additional address space and the routing advertisements for all of the subnets are combined into a single routing table entry.
- The local administrator has the flexibility to deploy additional subnets without obtaining a new network number from the Internet.
- Route flapping (i.e., the rapid changing of routes) within the private network does not affect the Internet routing table since Internet routers do not know about the reachability of the individual subnets - they just know about the reachability of the parent network number.

Extended-Network-Prefix

Internet routers use only the network-prefix of the destination address to route traffic to a subnetted environment. Routers within the subnetted environment use the extended-network-prefix to route traffic between the individual subnets. The extended-network-prefix is composed of the classful network-prefix and the subnet-number.

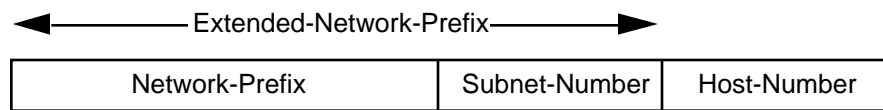


Figure 8: Extended-Network-Prefix

The extended-network-prefix has traditionally been identified by the subnet mask. For example, if you have the /16 address of 130.5.0.0 and you want to use the entire third octet to represent the subnet-number, you need to specify a subnet mask of 255.255.255.0. The bits in the subnet mask and the Internet address have a one-to-one correspondence. The bits of the subnet mask are set to 1 if the system examining the address should treat the corresponding bit in the IP address as part of the extended-network-prefix. The bits in the mask are set to 0 if the system should treat the bit as part of the host-number. This is illustrated in Figure 9.

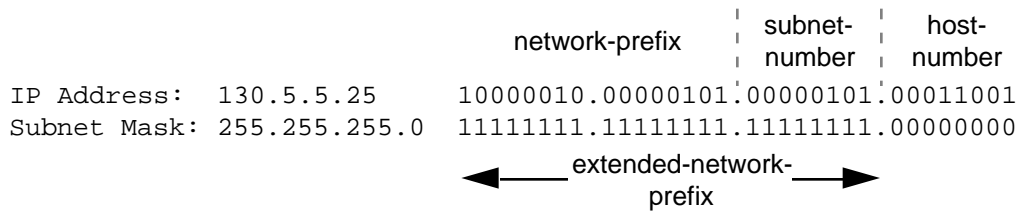


Figure 9: Subnet Mask

The standards describing modern routing protocols often refer to the extended-network-prefix-length rather than the subnet mask. The prefix length is equal to the number of contiguous one-bits in the traditional subnet mask. This means that specifying the network address 130.5.5.25 with a subnet mask of 255.255.255.0 can also be expressed as 130.5.5.25/24. The /<prefix-length> notation is more compact and easier to understand than writing out the mask in its traditional dotted-decimal format. This is illustrated in Figure 10.

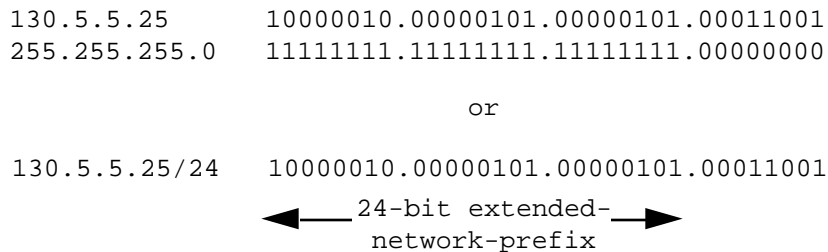


Figure 10: Extended-Network-Prefix Length

However, it is important to note that modern routing protocols still carry the subnet mask. There are no Internet standard routing protocols that have a one-byte field in their header that contains the number of bits in the extended-network prefix. Rather, each routing protocol is still required to carry the complete four-octet subnet mask.

Subnet Design Considerations

The deployment of an addressing plan requires careful thought on the part of the network administrator. There are four key questions that must be answered before any design should be undertaken:

- 1) How many total subnets does the organization need today?
- 2) How many total subnets will the organization need in the future?
- 3) How many hosts are there on the organization's largest subnet today?
- 4) How many hosts will there be on the organization's largest subnet in the future?

The first step in the planning process is to take the maximum number of subnets required and round up to the nearest power of two. For example, if a organization needs 9 subnets, 2^3 (or 8) will not provide enough subnet addressing space, so the network administrator will need to round up to 2^4 (or 16). When performing this assessment, it is critical that the network administrator always allow adequate room for future growth. For example, if 14 subnets are required today, then 16 subnets might not be enough in two years when the 17th subnet needs to be deployed. In this case, it might be wise to allow for more growth and select 2^5 (or 32) as the maximum number of subnets.

The second step is to make sure that there are enough host addresses for the organization's largest subnet. If the largest subnet needs to support 50 host addresses today, 2^5 (or 32) will not provide enough host address space so the network administrator will need to round up to 2^6 (or 64).

The final step is to make sure that the organization's address allocation provides enough bits to deploy the required subnet addressing plan. For example, if the organization has a single /16, it could easily deploy 4-bits for the subnet-number and 6-bits for the host number. However, if the organization has several /24s and it needs to deploy 9 subnets, it may be required to subnet each of its /24s into four subnets (using 2 bits) and then build the internet by combining the subnets of 3 different /24 network numbers. An alternative solution, would be to deploy network numbers from the private address space (RFC 1918) for internal connectivity and use a Network Address Translator (NAT) to provide external Internet access.

Subnet Example #1

Given

An organization has been assigned the network number 193.1.1.0/24 and it needs to define six subnets. The largest subnet is required to support 25 hosts.

Defining the Subnet Mask / Extended-Prefix Length

The first step is to determine the number of bits required to define the six subnets. Since a network address can only be subnetted along binary boundaries, subnets must be created in blocks of powers of two [2 (2^1), 4 (2^2), 8 (2^3), 16 (2^4), etc.]. Thus, it is impossible to define an IP address block such that it contains exactly six subnets. For this example, the network administrator must define a block of 8 (2^3) and have two unused subnets that can be reserved for future growth.

Since $8 = 2^3$, three bits are required to enumerate the eight subnets in the block. In this example, the organization is subnetting a /24 so it will need three more bits, or a /27, as the extended-network-prefix. A 27-bit extended-network-prefix can be expressed in dotted-decimal notation as 255.255.255.224. This is illustrated in Figure 11.

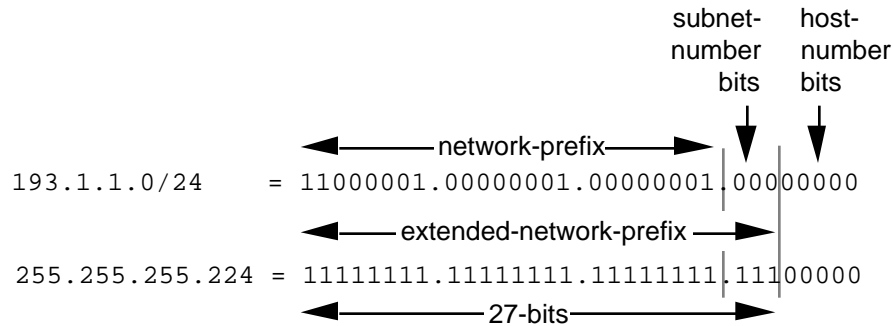


Figure 11: Example #1 - Defining the Subnet Mask/Extended-Prefix Length

A 27-bit extended-network-prefix leaves 5 bits to define host addresses on each subnet. This means that each subnetwork with a 27-bit prefix represents a contiguous block of 2^5 (32) individual IP addresses. However, since the all-0s and all-1s host addresses cannot be allocated, there are 30 ($2^5 - 2$) assignable host addresses on each subnet.

Defining Each of the Subnet Numbers

The eight subnets will be numbered 0 through 7. Throughout the remainder of this paper, the XXX_2 notation indicates the binary representation of the number. The 3-bit binary representation of the decimal values 0 through 7 are: 0 (000_2), 1 (001_2), 2 (010_2), 3 (011_2), 4 (100_2), 5 (101_2), 6 (110_2), and 7 (111_2).

In general, to define Subnet #n, the network administrator places the binary representation of n into the bits of the subnet-number field. For example, to define Subnet #6, the network administrator simply places the binary representation of 6 (110_2) into the 3-bits of the subnet-number field.

The eight subnet numbers for this example are given below. The underlined portion of each address identifies the extended-network-prefix, while the **bold** digits identify the 3-bits representing the subnet-number field:

```

Base Net:  11000001.00000001.00000001.00000000 = 193.1.1.0/24
Subnet #0: 11000001.00000001.00000001.00000000 = 193.1.1.0/27
Subnet #1: 11000001.00000001.00000001.00100000 = 193.1.1.32/27
Subnet #2: 11000001.00000001.00000001.01000000 = 193.1.1.64/27
Subnet #3: 11000001.00000001.00000001.01100000 = 193.1.1.96/27
Subnet #4: 11000001.00000001.00000001.10000000 = 193.1.1.128/27
Subnet #5: 11000001.00000001.00000001.10100000 = 193.1.1.160/27
Subnet #6: 11000001.00000001.00000001.11000000 = 193.1.1.192/27
Subnet #7: 11000001.00000001.00000001.11100000 = 193.1.1.224/27

```

An easy way to check if the subnets are correct is to ensure that they are all multiples of the Subnet #1 address. In this case, all subnets are multiples of 32: 0, 32, 64, 96, ...

The All-0s Subnet and The All-1s Subnet

When subnetting was first defined in RFC 950, it prohibited the use of the all-0s and the all-1s subnet. The reason for this restriction was to eliminate situations that could potentially confuse a classful router. Note that today a router can be both classless and classful at the same time - it could be running RIP-1 (a classful protocol) and BGP-4 (a classless protocol) at the same time.

With respect to the all-0s subnet, a router requires that each routing table update include the route/<prefix-length> pair to differentiate between a route to the all-0s subnet and a route to the entire network. For example, when using RIP-1 which does not supply a mask or prefix-length with each route, the routing advertisements for subnet 193.1.1.0/27 and for network 193.1.1.0/24 are identical - 193.1.1.0. Without somehow knowing the prefix-length or mask, a router cannot tell the difference between a route to the all-0s subnet and the route to the entire network! This is illustrated in Figure 12.

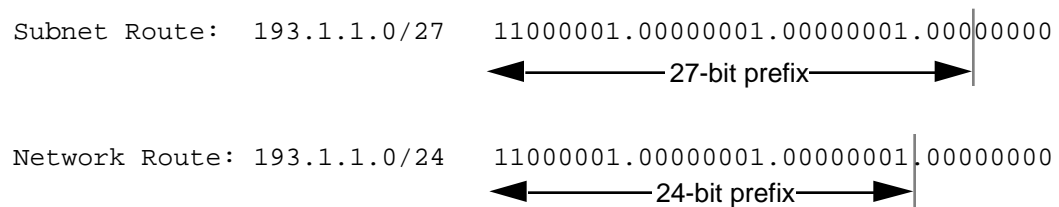


Figure 12: Differentiating Between a Route to the All-0s Subnet and the Entire Network

NETBuilder software has taken a phased approach in its support for the deployment of the all-0s and all-1s subnets. Table 2 shows the NETBuilder software version number that first implemented the various features that support the deployment of these subnets.

Table 2: NETBuilder Software Features Supporting the All-0s and All-1s Subnets

Release	Feature Supported
6.2	Permits a router interface to be configured with all-0s in the subnet field
7.0.0.6	Correctly learns and forwards to routes with all-0s in the subnet field
7.1	Correctly learns and forwards to routes with all-1s in the subnet field
8.3.0.2 7.2.1	Permits a router interface to be configured with all-1s in the subnet field

Finally, the other routers in the organization's network need to be able to correctly interpret, learn, and forward traffic to other subnetworks with all-0s and all-1s in their subnet number field.

Defining Host Addresses for Each Subnet

According to Internet practices, the host-number field of an IP address cannot contain all 0-bits or all 1-bits. The all-0s host-number identifies the base network (or subnetwork) number, while the all-1s host-number represents the broadcast address for the network (or subnetwork).

In our current example, there are 5 bits in the host-number field of each subnet address. This means that each subnet represents a block of 30 host addresses ($2^5 - 2 = 30$, note that the 2 is subtracted because the all-0s and the all-1s host addresses cannot be used). The hosts on each subnet are numbered 1 through 30.

In general, to define the address assigned to Host #n of a particular subnet, the network administrator places the binary representation of n into the subnet's host-number field. For example, to define the address assigned to Host #15 on Subnet #2, the network administrator simply places the binary representation of 15 (01111_2) into the 5-bits of Subnet #2's host-number field.

The valid host addresses for Subnet #2 in our example are given below. The underlined portion of each address identifies the extended-network-prefix, while the **bold** digits identify the 5-bit host-number field:

Subnet #2: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**00000** = 193.1.1.64/27

Host #1: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**00001** = 193.1.1.65/27

Host #2: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**00010** = 193.1.1.66/27

Host #3: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**00011** = 193.1.1.67/27

Host #4: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**00100** = 193.1.1.68/27

Host #5: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**00101** = 193.1.1.69/27

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Host #15: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**01111** = 193.1.1.79/27
 Host #16: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**10000** = 193.1.1.80/27
 .
 .
 Host #27: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**11011** = 193.1.1.91/27
 Host #28: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**11100** = 193.1.1.92/27
 Host #29: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**11101** = 193.1.1.93/27
 Host #30: 11000001.00000001.00000001.010**11110** = 193.1.1.94/27

The valid host addresses for Subnet #6 are given below. The underlined portion of each address identifies the extended-network-prefix, while the **bold** digits identify the 5-bit host-number field:

Subnet #6: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**00000** = 193.1.1.192/27
 Host #1: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**00001** = 193.1.1.193/27
 Host #2: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**00010** = 193.1.1.194/27
 Host #3: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**00011** = 193.1.1.195/27
 Host #4: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**00100** = 193.1.1.196/27
 Host #5: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**00101** = 193.1.1.197/27
 .
 .
 Host #15: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**01111** = 193.1.1.207/27
 Host #16: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**10000** = 193.1.1.208/27
 .
 .
 Host #27: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**11011** = 193.1.1.219/27
 Host #28: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**11100** = 193.1.1.220/27
 Host #29: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**11101** = 193.1.1.221/27
 Host #30: 11000001.00000001.00000001.110**11110** = 193.1.1.222/27

Defining the Broadcast Address for Each Subnet

The broadcast address for Subnet #2 is the all 1's host address or:

11000001.00000001.00000001.010**11111** = 193.1.1.95

Note that the broadcast address for Subnet #2 is exactly one less than the base address for Subnet #3 (193.1.1.96). This is always the case - the broadcast address for Subnet #n is one less than the base address for Subnet #(n+1).

The broadcast address for Subnet #6 is simply the all 1's host address or:

11000001.00000001.00000001.110**11111** = 193.1.1.223

Again, the broadcast address for Subnet #6 is exactly one less than the base address for Subnet #7 (193.1.1.224).

Subnet Example #2

Given

An organization has been assigned the network number 140.25.0.0/16 and it needs to create a set of subnets that supports up to 60 hosts on each subnet.

Defining the Subnet Mask / Extended-Prefix Length

The first step is to determine the number of bits required to define 60 hosts on each subnet. Since a block of host address can only be assigned along binary boundaries, host address blocks can only be created in powers of two. This means that it is impossible to create a block that contains exactly 60 host addresses. To support 60 hosts, the network administrator must define a minimum address block of 62 (2^6-2) host addresses. However, this choice would only provide two unused host addresses on each subnet for future growth. Since this does not appear to be adequate to support additional growth, the network administrator elects to define a block of 126 (2^7-2) host addresses and has 66 addresses on each subnet for future growth. A block of 126 host addresses requires 7-bits in the host-number field.

The next step is to determine the subnet mask/extended-prefix length. Since 7-bits of the 32-bit IP address are required for the host-number field, the extended-prefix must be a /25 ($25 = 32-7$). A 25-bit extended-network-prefix can be expressed in dotted-decimal notation as 255.255.255.128. This is illustrated in Figure 14.

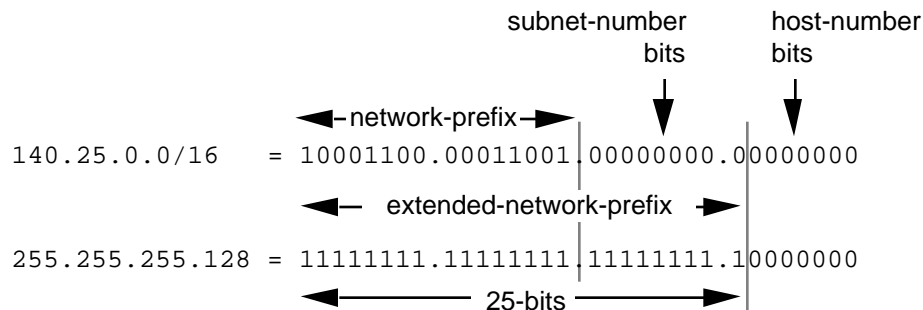


Figure 14: Example #2 - Defining the Subnet Mask/Extended-Prefix Length

Figure 14 shows that the 25-bit extended-prefix assigns 9-bits to the subnet number field. Since $2^9 = 512$, nine bits allow the definition of 512 subnets. Depending on the organization's requirements, the network administrator could have elected to assign additional bits to the host-number field (allowing more hosts on each subnet) and reduce the number of bits in the subnet-number field (decreasing the total number of subnets that can be defined).

Although this example creates a rather large number of subnets, it provides an interesting example because it illustrates what happens to the dotted-decimal representation of a subnet address when the subnet-number bits extend across an octet boundary. It should be mentioned that the same type of confusion can also occur when the host-number bits extend across an octet boundary.

Defining Each of the Subnet Numbers

The 512 subnets will be numbered 0 through 511. The 9-bit binary representation of the decimal values 0 through 511 are: 0 (00000000₂), 1 (00000001₂), 2 (00000010₂), 3 (00000011₂), ..., 511 (11111111₂). To define subnet #3, the network administrator places the binary representation of 3 (00000011₂) into the 9-bits of the subnet-number field.

The 512 subnet numbers for this example are given below. The underlined portion of each address identifies the extended-network-prefix, while the **bold** digits identify the 9-bits representing the subnet-number field:

```
Base Net:  10001100.00011001.00000000.00000000 = 140.25.0.0/16
Subnet #0:  10001100.00011001.00000000.00000000 = 140.25.0.0/25
Subnet #1:  10001100.00011001.00000000.10000000 = 140.25.0.128/25
Subnet #2:  10001100.00011001.00000001.00000000 = 140.25.1.0/25
Subnet #3:  10001100.00011001.00000001.10000000 = 140.25.1.128/25
Subnet #4:  10001100.00011001.00000010.00000000 = 140.25.2.0/25
Subnet #5:  10001100.00011001.00000010.10000000 = 140.25.2.128/25
Subnet #6:  10001100.00011001.00000011.00000000 = 140.25.3.0/25
Subnet #7:  10001100.00011001.00000011.10000000 = 140.25.3.128/25
Subnet #8:  10001100.00011001.00000100.00000000 = 140.25.4.0/25
Subnet #9:  10001100.00011001.00000100.10000000 = 140.25.4.128/25
.
.
Subnet #510: 10001100.00011001.11111111.00000000 = 140.25.255.0/25
Subnet #511: 10001100.00011001.11111111.10000000 = 140.25.255.128/25
```

Notice how sequential subnet numbers do not appear to be sequential when expressed in dotted-decimal notation. This can cause a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion since everyone believes that dotted-decimal notation makes it much easier for human users to understand IP addressing. In this example, the dotted-decimal notation obscures rather than clarifies the subnet numbering scheme!

Defining Hosts Addresses for Each Subnet

In this example there are 7 bits in the host-number field of each subnet address. As discussed earlier, this means that each subnet represents a block of 126 host addresses. The hosts on each subnet will be numbered 1 through 126.

The valid host addresses for Subnet #3 are given below. The underlined portion of each address identifies the extended-network-prefix, while the **bold** digits identify the 7-bit host-number field:

Subnet #3: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**0000000** = 140.25.1.128/25

Host #1: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**0000001** = 140.25.1.129/25

Host #2: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**0000010** = 140.25.1.130/25

Host #3: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**0000011** = 140.25.1.131/25

Host #4: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**0000100** = 140.25.1.132/25

Host #5: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**0000101** = 140.25.1.133/25

Host #6: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**0000110** = 140.25.1.134/25

.

Host #62: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**01111110** = 140.25.1.190/25

Host #63: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**01111111** = 140.25.1.191/25

Host #64: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**1000000** = 140.25.1.192/25

Host #65: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**1000001** = 140.25.1.193/25

.

Host #123: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**11111011** = 140.25.1.251/25

Host #124: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**11111100** = 140.25.1.252/25

Host #125: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**11111101** = 140.25.1.253/25

Host #126: 10001100.00011001.00000001.1**11111110** = 140.25.1.254/25

Defining the Broadcast Address for Each Subnet

The broadcast address for Subnet #3 is the all 1's host address or:

10001100.00011001.00000001.1**11111111** = 140.25.1.255

As is true in general, the broadcast address for Subnet #3 is exactly one less than the base address for Subnet #4 (140.25.2.0).

Additional Practice with Subnetworks

Please turn to Appendix C for practice exercises to further your understanding of subnetting.

Variable Length Subnet Masks (VLSM)

In 1987, RFC 1009 specified how a subnetted network could use more than one subnet mask. When an IP network is assigned more than one subnet mask, it is considered a network with "variable length subnet masks" since the extended-network-prefixes have different lengths.

RIP-1 Permits Only a Single Subnet Mask

When using RIP-1, subnet masks have to be uniform across the entire network-prefix. RIP-1 allows only a single subnet mask to be used within each network number because it does not provide subnet mask information as part of its routing table update messages. In the absence of this information, RIP-1 is forced to make very simple assumptions about the mask that should be applied to any of its learned routes.

How does a RIP-1 based router know what mask to apply to a route when it learns a new route from a neighbor? If the router has a subnet of the same network number assigned to a local interface, it assumes that the learned subnetwork was defined using the same mask as the locally configured interface. However, if the router does not have a subnet of the learned network number assigned to a local interface, the router has to assume that the network is not subnetted and applies the route's natural classful mask.

Assuming that Port 1 of a router has been assigned the IP address 130.24.13.1/24 and that Port 2 has been assigned the IP address 200.14.13.2/24. If the router learns about network 130.24.36.0 from a neighbor, it applies a /24 mask since Port 1 is configured with another subnet of the 130.24.0.0 network. However, when the router learns about network 131.25.0.0 from a neighbor, it assumes a "natural" /16 mask since it has no other masking information available.

How does a RIP-1 based router know if it should include the subnet-number bits in a routing table update to a RIP-1 neighbor? A router executing RIP-1 will only advertise the subnet-number bits on another port if the update port is configured with a subnet of the same network number. If the update port is configured with a different subnet or network number, the router will only advertise the network portion of the subnet route and "zero-out" the subnet-number field.

For example, assume that Port 1 of a router has been assigned the IP address 130.24.13.1/24 and that Port 2 has been assigned the IP address 200.14.13.2/24. Also, assume that the router has learned about network 130.24.36.0 from a neighbor. Since Port 1 is configured with another subnet of the 130.24.0.0 network, the router assumes that network 130.24.36.0 has a /24 subnet mask. When it comes to advertise this route, it advertises 130.24.36.0 on Port 1, but it only advertises 130.24.0.0 on Port 2.

For these reasons, RIP-1 is limited to only a single subnet mask for each network number. However, there are several advantages to be gained if more than one subnet mask can be assigned to a given IP network number:

- Multiple subnet masks permit more efficient use of an organization's assigned IP address space.
- Multiple subnet masks permit route aggregation which can significantly reduce the amount of routing information at the "backbone" level within an organization's routing domain.

Efficient Use of the Organization's Assigned IP Address Space

VLSM supports more efficient use of an organization's assigned IP address space. One of the major problems with the earlier limitation of supporting only a single subnet mask across a given network-prefix was that once the mask was selected, it locked the organization into a fixed-number of fixed-sized subnets. For example, assume that a network administrator decided to configure the 130.5.0.0/16 network with a /22 extended-network-prefix.

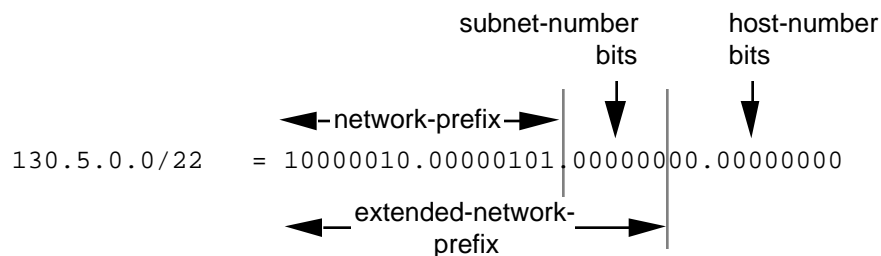


Figure 15: 130.5.0.0/16 with a /22 Extended-Network Prefix

Please refer to Figure 15. A /16 network with a /22 extended-network prefix permits 64 subnets (2^6), each of which supports a maximum of 1,022 hosts ($2^{10}-2$). This is fine if the organization wants to deploy a number of large subnets, but what about the occasional small subnet containing only 20 or 30 hosts? Since a subnetted network could have only a single mask, the network administrator was still required to assign the 20 or 30 hosts to a subnet with a 22-bit prefix. This assignment would waste approximately 1,000 IP host addresses for each small subnet deployed! Limiting the association of a network number with a single mask did not encourage the flexible and efficient use of an organization's address space.

One solution to this problem was to allow a subnetted network to be assigned more than one subnet mask. Assume that in the previous example, the network administrator is also allowed to configure the 130.5.0.0/16 network with a /26 extended-network-prefix. Please refer to Figure 16. A /16 network address with a /26 extended-network prefix permits 1024 subnets (2^{10}), each of which supports a maximum of 62 hosts (2^6-2). The /26 prefix would be ideal for small subnets with less than 60 hosts, while the /22 prefix is well suited for larger subnets containing up to 1000 hosts.