

NetCDF Climate and Forecast (CF) Metadata Conventions

Version 1.3, 7 November, 2008

Original Authors

Brian Eaton, NCAR

Jonathan Gregory, Hadley Centre, UK Met Office

Bob Drach, PCMDI, LLNL

Karl Taylor, PCMDI, LLNL

Steve Hankin, PMEL, NOAA

Additional Authors

John Caron, UCAR

Rich Signell, USGS

Phil Bentley, Hadley Centre, UK Met Office

Greg Rappa, MIT

NetCDF Climate and Forecast (CF) Metadata Conventions: Version 1.3, 7 November, 2008

by Brian Eaton, Jonathan Gregory, Bob Drach, Karl Taylor, and Steve Hankin
by John Caron, Rich Signell, Phil Bentley, and Greg Rappa

Many others have contributed to the development of CF through their participation in discussions about proposed changes.

:

Abstract

This document describes the CF conventions for climate and forecast metadata designed to promote the processing and sharing of files created with the netCDF Application Programmer Interface [[NetCDF](#)]. The conventions define metadata that provide a definitive description of what the data in each variable represents, and of the spatial and temporal properties of the data. This enables users of data from different sources to decide which quantities are comparable, and facilitates building applications with powerful extraction, regridding, and display capabilities.

The CF conventions generalize and extend the COARDS conventions [[COARDS](#)]. The extensions include metadata that provides a precise definition of each variable via specification of a standard name, describes the vertical locations corresponding to dimensionless vertical coordinate values, and provides the spatial coordinates of non-rectilinear gridded data. Since climate and forecast data are often not simply representative of points in space/time, other extensions provide for the description of coordinate intervals, multidimensional cells and climatological time coordinates, and indicate how a data value is representative of an interval or cell. This standard also relaxes the COARDS constraints on dimension order and specifies methods for reducing the size of datasets.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Preface | vii |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1. Goals | 1 |
| 1.2. Terminology | 1 |
| 1.3. Overview | 2 |
| 1.4. Relationship to the COARDS Conventions | 4 |
| 2. NetCDF Files and Components | 5 |
| 2.1. Filename | 5 |
| 2.2. Data Types | 5 |
| 2.3. Naming Conventions | 5 |
| 2.4. Dimensions | 5 |
| 2.5. Variables | 6 |
| 2.5.1. Missing Data | 6 |
| 2.6. Attributes | 7 |
| 2.6.1. Identification of Conventions | 7 |
| 2.6.2. Description of file contents | 7 |
| 3. Description of the Data | 9 |
| 3.1. Units | 9 |
| 3.2. Long Name | 10 |
| 3.3. Standard Name | 10 |
| 3.4. Ancillary Data | 11 |
| 3.5. Flags | 12 |
| 4. Coordinate Types | 15 |
| 4.1. Latitude Coordinate | 15 |
| 4.2. Longitude Coordinate | 16 |
| 4.3. Vertical (Height or Depth) Coordinate | 16 |
| 4.3.1. Dimensional Vertical Coordinate | 17 |
| 4.3.2. Dimensionless Vertical Coordinate | 17 |
| 4.4. Time Coordinate | 18 |
| 4.4.1. Calendar | 19 |
| 5. Coordinate Systems | 21 |
| 5.1. Independent Latitude, Longitude, Vertical, and Time Axes | 21 |
| 5.2. Two-Dimensional Latitude, Longitude, Coordinate Variables | 22 |
| 5.3. Reduced Horizontal Grid | 23 |
| 5.4. Timeseries of Station Data | 24 |
| 5.5. Trajectories | 24 |
| 5.6. Grid Mappings and Projections Horizontal Coordinate Reference Systems, Grid Mappings, and Projections | 25 |
| 5.7. Scalar Coordinate Variables | 28 |
| 6. Labels and Alternative Coordinates | 30 |
| 6.1. Labels | 30 |
| 6.1.1. Geographic Regions | 30 |
| 6.2. Alternative Coordinates | 31 |
| 7. Data Representative of Cells | 32 |
| 7.1. Cell Boundaries | 32 |
| 7.2. Cell Measures | 34 |
| 7.3. Cell Methods | 35 |
| 7.4. Climatological Statistics | 38 |
| 8. Reduction of Dataset Size | 42 |
| 8.1. Packed Data | 42 |
| 8.2. Compression by Gathering | 42 |

NetCDF Climate and Forecast
(CF) Metadata Conventions

| | |
|---|----|
| A. Attributes | 44 |
| B. Standard Name Table Format | 48 |
| C. Standard Name Modifiers | 51 |
| D. Dimensionless Vertical Coordinates | 52 |
| E. Cell Methods | 57 |
| F. Grid Mappings | 58 |
| G. Revision History | 65 |
| Bibliography | 67 |

List of Tables

| | |
|---|----|
| 3.1. Supported Units | 9 |
| 3.2. Flag Variable Bits (from Example) | 13 |
| 3.3. Flag Variable Bit 2 and Bit 3 (from Example) | 13 |
| A.1. Attributes | 44 |
| C.1. Standard Name Modifiers | 51 |
| E.1. Cell Methods | 57 |
| F.1. Grid Mapping Attributes | 62 |

List of Examples

| | |
|--|----|
| 3.1. Use of <code>standard_name</code> | 11 |
| 3.2. Instrument data | 11 |
| 3.3. A flag variable, using <code>flag_values</code> | 12 |
| 3.4. A flag variable, using <code>flag_masks</code> | 12 |
| 3.5. A flag variable, using <code>flag_masks</code> and <code>flag_values</code> | 13 |
| 4.1. Latitude axis | 15 |
| 4.2. Longitude axis | 16 |
| 4.3. Atmosphere sigma coordinate | 17 |
| 4.4. Time axis | 18 |
| 4.5. Perpetual time axis | 19 |
| 4.6. Paleoclimate time axis | 20 |
| 5.1. Independent coordinate variables | 22 |
| 5.2. Two-dimensional coordinate variables | 22 |
| 5.3. Reduced horizontal grid | 23 |
| 5.4. Timeseries of station data | 24 |
| 5.5. Trajectories | 24 |
| 5.6. Rotated pole grid | 25 |
| 5.7. Lambert conformal projection | 26 |
| 5.8. Latitude and longitude on a spherical Earth | 27 |
| 5.9. Latitude and longitude on the WGS 1984 datum | 27 |
| 5.10. British National Grid | 28 |
| 5.11. Multiple forecasts from a single analysis | 29 |
| 6.1. Several parcel trajectories | 30 |
| 6.2. Northward heat transport in Atlantic Ocean | 30 |
| 6.3. Model level numbers | 31 |
| 7.1. Cells on a latitude axis | 33 |
| 7.2. Cells in a non-rectangular grid | 33 |
| 7.3. Cell areas for a spherical geodesic grid | 34 |
| 7.4. Methods applied to a timeseries | 35 |
| 7.5. Surface air temperature variance | 37 |
| 7.6. Climatological seasons | 39 |
| 7.7. Decadal averages for January | 39 |
| 7.8. Temperature for each hour of the average day | 40 |
| 7.9. Temperature for each hour of the typical climatological day | 40 |
| 7.10. Monthly-maximum daily precipitation totals | 41 |
| 8.1. Horizontal compression of a three-dimensional array | 43 |
| 8.2. Compression of a three-dimensional field | 43 |
| B.1. A name table containing three entries | 49 |

Preface

Home page:

Contains links to: previous draft and current working draft documents; applications for processing CF conforming files; email list for discussion about interpretation, clarification, and proposals for changes or extensions to the current conventions. <http://www-pcmdi.llnl.gov/cf/>

Revision history:

This document will be updated to reflect agreed changes to the standard and to correct mistakes according to the rules of [CF governance](#)¹. See [Appendix G, Revision History](#) for the full revision history. Changes with provisional status use the following mark-up style: **new text**, ~~deleted text~~, and *[a comment]*.

¹ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/governance>

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Goals

The NetCDF library [[NetCDF](#)] is designed to read and write data that has been structured according to well-defined rules and is easily ported across various computer platforms. The netCDF interface enables but does not require the creation of *self-describing* datasets. The purpose of the CF conventions is to require conforming datasets to contain sufficient metadata that they are self-describing in the sense that each variable in the file has an associated description of what it represents, including physical units if appropriate, and that each value can be located in space (relative to earth-based coordinates) and time.

An important benefit of a convention is that it enables software tools to display data and perform operations on specified subsets of the data with minimal user intervention. It is possible to provide the metadata describing how a field is located in time and space in many different ways that a human would immediately recognize as equivalent. The purpose in restricting how the metadata is represented is to make it practical to write software that allows a machine to parse that metadata and to automatically associate each data value with its location in time and space. It is equally important that the metadata be easy for human users to write and to understand.

This standard is intended for use with climate and forecast data, for atmosphere, surface and ocean, and was designed with model-generated data particularly in mind. We recognise that there are limits to what a standard can practically cover; we restrict ourselves to issues that we believe to be of common and frequent concern in the design of climate and forecast metadata. Our main purpose therefore, is to propose a clear, adequate and flexible definition of the metadata needed for climate and forecast data. Although this is specifically a netCDF standard, we feel that most of the ideas are of wider application. The metadata objects could be contained in file formats other than netCDF. Conversion of the metadata between files of different formats will be facilitated if conventions for all formats are based on similar ideas.

This convention is designed to be backward compatible with the COARDS conventions [[COARDS](#)], by which we mean that a conforming COARDS dataset also conforms to the CF standard. Thus new applications that implement the CF conventions will be able to process COARDS datasets.

We have also striven to maximize conformance to the COARDS standard, that is, wherever the COARDS metadata conventions provide an adequate description we require their use. Extensions to COARDS are implemented in a manner such that the content that doesn't depend on the extensions is still accessible to applications that adhere to the COARDS standard.

1.2. Terminology

The terms in this document that refer to components of a netCDF file are defined in the NetCDF User's Guide (NUG) [[NUG](#)] NUG. Some of those definitions are repeated below for convenience.

auxiliary coordinate variable

Any netCDF variable that contains coordinate data, but is not a coordinate variable (in the sense of that term defined by the NUG and used by this standard - see below). Unlike coordinate variables, there is no relationship between the name of an auxiliary coordinate variable and the name(s) of its dimension(s).

boundary variable

A boundary variable is associated with a variable that contains coordinate data. When a data value provides information about conditions in a cell occupying a region of space/time or some other dimension, the boundary variable provides a description of cell extent.

CDL syntax

The ascii format used to describe the contents of a netCDF file is called CDL (network Common Data form Language). This format represents arrays using the indexing conventions of the C programming language, i.e.,

index values start at 0, and in multidimensional arrays, when indexing over the elements of the array, it is the last declared dimension that is the fastest varying in terms of file storage order. The netCDF utilities `ncdump` and `ncgen` use this format (see [chapter 10 of the NUG](#)¹). All examples in this document use CDL syntax.

cell

A region in one or more dimensions whose boundary can be described by a set of vertices. The term *interval* is sometimes used for one-dimensional cells.

coordinate variable

We use this term precisely as it is defined in section [2.3.1 of the NUG](#)². It is a one-dimensional variable with the same name as its dimension [e.g., `time(time)`], and it is defined as a numeric data type with values that are ordered monotonically. Missing values are not allowed in coordinate variables.

grid mapping variable

A variable used as a container for attributes that define a specific grid mapping. The type of the variable is arbitrary since it contains no data.

latitude dimension

A dimension of a netCDF variable that has an associated latitude coordinate variable.

longitude dimension

A dimension of a netCDF variable that has an associated longitude coordinate variable.

multidimensional coordinate variable

An auxiliary coordinate variable that is multidimensional.

recommendation

Recommendations in this convention are meant to provide advice that may be helpful for reducing common mistakes. In some cases we have recommended rather than required particular attributes in order to maintain backwards compatibility with COARDS. An application must not depend on a dataset's adherence to recommendations.

scalar coordinate variable

A scalar variable that contains coordinate data. Functionally equivalent to either a size one coordinate variable or a size one auxiliary coordinate variable.

spatiotemporal dimension

A dimension of a netCDF variable that is used to identify a location in time and/or space.

time dimension

A dimension of a netCDF variable that has an associated time coordinate variable.

vertical dimension

A dimension of a netCDF variable that has an associated vertical coordinate variable.

1.3. Overview

No variable or dimension names are standardized by this convention. Instead we follow the lead of the NUG and standardize only the names of attributes and some of the values taken by those attributes. The overview provided in this section will be followed with more complete descriptions in following sections. [Appendix A, Attributes](#) contains a summary of all the attributes used in this convention.

We recommend that the NUG defined attribute `Conventions` be given the string value `"CF-1.2"` `"CF-1.3"` to identify datasets that conform to these conventions.

¹ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-15.html#HEADING15-0>

² <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-7.html#HEADING7-67>

The general description of a file's contents should be contained in the following attributes: `title`, `history`, `institution`, `source`, `comment` and `references` (Section 2.6.2, “Description of file contents”). For backwards compatibility with COARDS none of these attributes is required, but their use is recommended to provide human readable documentation of the file contents.

Each variable in a netCDF file has an associated description which is provided by the attributes `units`, `long_name`, and `standard_name`. The `units`, and `long_name` attributes are defined in the NUG and the `standard_name` attribute is defined in this document.

The `units` attribute is required for all variables that represent dimensional quantities (except for boundary variables defined in Section 7.1, “Cell Boundaries”). The values of the `units` attributes are character strings that are recognized by UNIDATA's Uunits package [UDUNITS], (with exceptions allowed as discussed in Section 3.1, “Units”).

The `long_name` and `standard_name` attributes are used to describe the content of each variable. For backwards compatibility with COARDS neither is required, but use of at least one of them is strongly recommended. The use of standard names will facilitate the exchange of climate and forecast data by providing unambiguous identification of variables most commonly analyzed.

Four types of coordinates receive special treatment by these conventions: latitude, longitude, vertical, and time. Every variable must have associated metadata that allows identification of each such coordinate that is relevant. Two independent parts of the convention allow this to be done. There are conventions that identify the variables that contain the coordinate data, and there are conventions that identify the type of coordinate represented by that data.

There are two methods used to identify variables that contain coordinate data. The first is to use the NUG-defined "coordinate variables." *The use of coordinate variables is required for all dimensions that correspond to one dimensional space or time coordinates.* In cases where coordinate variables are not applicable, the variables containing coordinate data are identified by the `coordinates` attribute.

Once the variables containing coordinate data are identified, further conventions are required to determine the type of coordinate represented by each of these variables. Latitude, longitude, and time coordinates are identified solely by the value of their `units` attribute. Vertical coordinates with units of pressure may also be identified by the `units` attribute. Other vertical coordinates must use the attribute `positive` which determines whether the direction of increasing coordinate value is up or down. Because identification of a coordinate type by its units involves the use of an external software package [UDUNITS], we provide the optional attribute `axis` for a direct identification of coordinates that correspond to latitude, longitude, vertical, or time axes.

Latitude, longitude, and time are defined by internationally recognized standards, and hence, identifying the coordinates of these types is sufficient to locate data values uniquely with respect to time and a point on the earth's surface. On the other hand identifying the vertical coordinate is not necessarily sufficient to locate a data value vertically with respect to the earth's surface. In particular a model may output data on the dimensionless vertical coordinate used in its mathematical formulation. To achieve the goal of being able to spatially locate all data values, this convention includes the definitions of common dimensionless vertical coordinates in Appendix D, *Dimensionless Vertical Coordinates*. These definitions provide a mapping between the dimensionless coordinate values and dimensional values that can be uniquely located with respect to a point on the earth's surface. The definitions are associated with a coordinate variable via the `standard_name` and `formula_terms` attributes. For backwards compatibility with COARDS use of these attributes is not required, but is strongly recommended.

It is often the case that data values are not representative of single points in time and/or space, but rather of intervals or multidimensional cells. This convention defines a `bounds` attribute to specify the extent of intervals or cells. When data that is representative of cells can be described by simple statistical methods, those methods can be indicated using the `cell_methods` attribute. An important application of this attribute is to describe climatological and diurnal statistics.

Methods for reducing the total volume of data include both packing and compression. Packing reduces the data volume by reducing the precision of the stored numbers. It is implemented using the attributes `add_offset` and

`scale_factor` which are defined in the NUG. Compression on the other hand loses no precision, but reduces the volume by not storing missing data. The attribute `compress` is defined for this purpose.

1.4. Relationship to the COARDS Conventions

These conventions generalize and extend the COARDS conventions [COARDS]. A major design goal has been to maintain *backward compatibility* with COARDS. Hence applications written to process datasets that conform to these conventions will also be able to process COARDS conforming datasets. We have also striven to maximize *conformance* to the COARDS standard so that datasets that only require the metadata that was available under COARDS will still be able to be processed by COARDS conforming applications. But because of the extensions that provide new metadata content, and the relaxation of some COARDS requirements, datasets that conform to these conventions will not necessarily be recognized by applications that adhere to the COARDS conventions. The features of these conventions that allow writing netCDF files that are not COARDS conforming are summarized below.

COARDS standardizes the description of grids composed of independent latitude, longitude, vertical, and time axes. In addition to standardizing the metadata required to identify each of these axis types COARDS restricts the axis (equivalently dimension) ordering to be longitude, latitude, vertical, and time (with longitude being the most rapidly varying dimension). Because of I/O performance considerations it may not be possible for models to output their data in conformance with the COARDS requirement. The CF convention places no rigid restrictions on the order of dimensions, however we encourage data producers to make the extra effort to stay within the COARDS standard order. The use of non-COARDS axis ordering will render files inaccessible to some applications and limit interoperability. Often a buffering operation can be used to minimize performance penalties when axis ordering in model code does not match the axis ordering of a COARDS file.

COARDS addresses the issue of identifying dimensionless vertical coordinates, but does not provide any mechanism for mapping the dimensionless values to dimensional ones that can be located with respect to the earth's surface. For backwards compatibility we continue to allow (but do not require) the `units` attribute of dimensionless vertical coordinates to take the values "level", "layer", or "sigma_level." But we recommend that the `standard_name` and `formula_terms` attributes be used to identify the appropriate definition of the dimensionless vertical coordinate (see [Section 4.3.2, "Dimensionless Vertical Coordinate"](#)).

The CF conventions define attributes which enable the description of data properties that are outside the scope of the COARDS conventions. These new attributes do not violate the COARDS conventions, but applications that only recognize COARDS conforming datasets will not have the capabilities that the new attributes are meant to enable. Briefly the new attributes allow:

- Identification of quantities using standard names.
- Description of dimensionless vertical coordinates.
- Associating dimensions with auxiliary coordinate variables.
- Linking data variables to scalar coordinate variables.
- Associating dimensions with labels.
- Description of intervals and cells.
- Description of properties of data defined on intervals and cells.
- Description of climatological statistics.
- Data compression for variables with missing values.

Chapter 2. NetCDF Files and Components

The components of a netCDF file are described in section 2 of the NUG [NUG]. In this section we describe conventions associated with filenames and the basic components of a netCDF file. We also introduce new attributes for describing the contents of a file.

2.1. Filename

NetCDF files should have the file name extension ".nc".

2.2. Data Types

The netCDF data types `char`, `byte`, `short`, `int`, `float` or `real`, and `double` are all acceptable. The `char` type is not intended for numeric data. One byte numeric data should be stored using the `byte` data type. All integer types are treated by the netCDF interface as signed. It is possible to treat the `byte` type as unsigned by using the NUG convention of indicating the unsigned range using the `valid_min`, `valid_max`, or `valid_range` attributes.

NetCDF does not support a character string type, so these must be represented as character arrays. In this document, a one dimensional array of character data is simply referred to as a "string". An n-dimensional array of strings must be implemented as a character array of dimension (n,max_string_length), with the last (most rapidly varying) dimension declared large enough to contain the longest string in the array. All the strings in a given array are therefore defined to be equal in length. For example, an array of strings containing the names of the months would be dimensioned (12,9) in order to accommodate "September", the month with the longest name.

2.3. Naming Conventions

Variable, dimension and attribute names should begin with a letter and be composed of letters, digits, and underscores. Note that this is in conformance with the COARDS conventions, but is more restrictive than the netCDF interface which allows use of the hyphen character. The netCDF interface also allows leading underscores in names, but the NUG states that this is reserved for system use.

Case is significant in netCDF names, but it is recommended that names should not be distinguished purely by case, i.e., if case is disregarded, no two names should be the same. It is also recommended that names should be obviously meaningful, if possible, as this renders the file more effectively self-describing.

This convention does not standardize any variable or dimension names. Attribute names and their contents, where standardized, are given in English in this document and should appear in English in conforming netCDF files for the sake of portability. Languages other than English are permitted for variables, dimensions, and non-standardized attributes. The content of some standardized attributes are string values that are not standardized, and thus are not required to be in English. For example, a description of what a variable represents may be given in a non-English language using the `long_name` attribute (see [Section 3.2, "Long Name"](#)) whose contents are not standardized, but a description given by the `standard_name` attribute (see [Section 3.3, "Standard Name"](#)) must be taken from the standard name table which is in English.

2.4. Dimensions

A variable may have any number of dimensions, including zero, and the dimensions must all have different names. *COARDS strongly recommends limiting the number of dimensions to four, but we wish to allow greater flexibility.*

The dimensions of the variable define the axes of the quantity it contains. Dimensions other than those of space and time may be included. Several examples can be found in this document. Under certain circumstances, one may need more than one dimension in a particular quantity. For instance, a variable containing a two-dimensional probability density function might correlate the temperature at two different vertical levels, and hence would have temperature on both axes.

If any or all of the dimensions of a variable have the interpretations of "date or time" (T), "height or depth" (Z), "latitude" (Y), or "longitude" (X) then we recommend, but do not require (see [Section 1.4, "Relationship to the COARDS Conventions"](#)), those dimensions to appear in the relative order T, then Z, then Y, then X in the CDL definition corresponding to the file. All other dimensions should, whenever possible, be placed to the left of the spatiotemporal dimensions.

Dimensions may be of any size, including unity. When a single value of some coordinate applies to all the values in a variable, the recommended means of attaching this information to the variable is by use of a dimension of size unity with a one-element coordinate variable. It is also acceptable to use a scalar coordinate variable which eliminates the need for an associated size one dimension in the data variable. The advantage of using a coordinate variable is that all its attributes can be used to describe the single-valued quantity, including boundaries. For example, a variable containing data for temperature at 1.5 m above the ground has a single-valued coordinate supplying a height of 1.5 m, and a time-mean quantity has a single-valued time coordinate with an associated boundary variable to record the start and end of the averaging period.

2.5. Variables

This convention does not standardize variable names.

NetCDF variables that contain coordinate data are referred to as *coordinate variables*, *auxiliary coordinate variables*, *scalar coordinate variables*, or *multidimensional coordinate variables*.

2.5.1. Missing Data

The NUG conventions ([NUG section 8.1](#)¹) provide the `_FillValue`, `valid_min`, `valid_max`, and `valid_range` attributes to indicate missing data.

The NUG conventions for missing data changed significantly between version 2.3 and version 2.4. Since version 2.4 the NUG defines missing data as all values outside of the `valid_range`, and specifies how the `valid_range` should be defined from the `_FillValue` (which has library specified default values) if it hasn't been explicitly specified. If only one missing value is needed for a variable then we strongly recommend that this value be specified using the `_FillValue` attribute. Doing this guarantees that the missing value will be recognized by generic applications that follow either the before or after version 2.4 conventions.

The scalar attribute with the name `_FillValue` and of the same type as its variable is recognized by the netCDF library as the value used to pre-fill disk space allocated to the variable. This value is considered to be a special value that indicates undefined or missing data, and is returned when reading values that were not written. The `_FillValue` should be outside the range specified by `valid_range` (if used) for a variable. The netCDF library defines a default fill value for each data type ([NUG section 7.16](#)²).

The `missing_value` attribute is considered deprecated by the NUG and we do not recommend its use. However for backwards compatibility with COARDS this standard continues to recognize the use of the `missing_value` attribute to indicate undefined or missing data.

The missing values of a variable with `scale_factor` and/or `add_offset` attributes (see [Section 8.1, "Packed Data"](#)) are interpreted relative to the variable's external values, i.e., the values stored in the netCDF file.

¹ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

² <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-12.html#HEADING12-1381>

Applications that process variables that have attributes to indicate both a transformation (via a scale and/or offset) and missing values should first check that a data value is valid, and then apply the transformation. Note that values that are identified as missing should not be transformed. Since the missing value is outside the valid range it is possible that applying a transformation to it could result in an invalid operation. For example, the default `_FillValue` is very close to the maximum representable value of IEEE single precision floats, and multiplying it by 100 produces an "Infinity" (using single precision arithmetic).

2.6. Attributes

This standard describes many attributes (some mandatory, others optional), but a file may also contain non-standard attributes. Such attributes do not represent a violation of this standard. Application programs should ignore attributes that they do not recognise or which are irrelevant for their purposes. Conventional attribute names should be used wherever applicable. Non-standard names should be as meaningful as possible. Before introducing an attribute, consideration should be given to whether the information would be better represented as a variable. In general, if a proposed attribute requires ancillary data to describe it, is multidimensional, requires any of the defined netCDF dimensions to index its values, or requires a significant amount of storage, a variable should be used instead. When this standard defines string attributes that may take various prescribed values, the possible values are generally given in lower case. However, applications programs should not be sensitive to case in these attributes. Several string attributes are defined by this standard to contain "blank-separated lists". Consecutive words in such a list are separated by one or more adjacent spaces. The list may begin and end with any number of spaces. See [Appendix A, Attributes](#) for a list of attributes described by this standard.

2.6.1. Identification of Conventions

We recommend that netCDF files that follow these conventions indicate this by setting the NUG defined global attribute `Conventions` to the string value `"CF-1.2"` `"CF-1.3"`. The string is interpreted as a directory name relative to a directory that is a repository of documents describing sets of discipline-specific conventions. The conventions directory name is currently interpreted relative to the directory `pub/netcdf/Conventions/` on the host machine `ftp.unidata.ucar.edu`. The web based versions of this document are linked from the [netCDF Conventions web page](#)³.

2.6.2. Description of file contents

The following attributes are intended to provide information about where the data came from and what has been done to it. This information is mainly for the benefit of human readers. The attribute values are all character strings. For readability in `ncdump` outputs it is recommended to embed newline characters into long strings to break them into lines. For backwards compatibility with COARDS none of these global attributes is required.

The NUG defines `title` and `history` to be global attributes. We wish to allow the newly defined attributes, i.e., `institution`, `source`, `references`, and `comment`, to be either global or assigned to individual variables. When an attribute appears both globally and as a variable attribute, the variable's version has precedence.

`title`

A succinct description of what is in the dataset.

`institution`

Specifies where the original data was produced.

`source`

The method of production of the original data. If it was model-generated, `source` should name the model and its version, as specifically as could be useful. If it is observational, `source` should characterize it (e.g., "surface observation" or "radiosonde").

³ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/conventions.html>

history

Provides an audit trail for modifications to the original data. Well-behaved generic netCDF filters will automatically append their name and the parameters with which they were invoked to the global history attribute of an input netCDF file. We recommend that each line begin with a timestamp indicating the date and time of day that the program was executed.

references

Published or web-based references that describe the data or methods used to produce it.

comment

Miscellaneous information about the data or methods used to produce it.

Chapter 3. Description of the Data

The attributes described in this section are used to provide a description of the content and the units of measurement for each variable. We continue to support the use of the `units` and `long_name` attributes as defined in COARDS. We extend COARDS by adding the optional `standard_name` attribute which is used to provide unique identifiers for variables. This is important for data exchange since one cannot necessarily identify a particular variable based on the name assigned to it by the institution that provided the data.

The `standard_name` attribute can be used to identify variables that contain coordinate data. But since it is an optional attribute, applications that implement these standards must continue to be able to identify coordinate types based on the COARDS conventions.

3.1. Units

The `units` attribute is required for all variables that represent dimensional quantities (except for boundary variables defined in [Section 7.1, “Cell Boundaries”](#) and climatology variables defined in [Section 7.4, “Climatological Statistics”](#)). The value of the `units` attribute is a string that can be recognized by UNIDATA's Uunits package [UDUNITS], with a few exceptions that are given below. The [Uunits package](#)¹ includes a file `udunits.dat`, which lists its supported unit names. Note that case is significant in the `units` strings.

The COARDS convention prohibits the unit `degrees` altogether, but this unit is not forbidden by the CF convention because it may in fact be appropriate for a variable containing, say, solar zenith angle. The unit `degrees` is also allowed on coordinate variables such as the latitude and longitude coordinates of a transformed grid. In this case the coordinate values are not true latitudes and longitudes which must always be identified using the more specific forms of `degrees` as described in [Section 4.1, “Latitude Coordinate”](#) and [Section 4.2, “Longitude Coordinate”](#).

Units are not required for dimensionless quantities. A variable with no `units` attribute is assumed to be dimensionless. However, a `units` attribute specifying a dimensionless unit may optionally be included. The Uunits package defines a few dimensionless units, such as `percent`, but is lacking commonly used units such as ppm (parts per million). This convention does not support the addition of new dimensionless units that are not uunits compatible. The conforming unit for quantities that represent fractions, or parts of a whole, is "1". The conforming unit for parts per million is "1e-6". Descriptive information about dimensionless quantities, such as sea-ice concentration, cloud fraction, probability, etc., should be given in the `long_name` or `standard_name` attributes (see below) rather than the `units`.

The units `level`, `layer`, and `sigma_level` are allowed for dimensionless vertical coordinates to maintain backwards compatibility with COARDS. These units are not compatible with Uunits and are deprecated by this standard because conventions for more precisely identifying dimensionless vertical coordinates are introduced (see [Section 4.3.2, “Dimensionless Vertical Coordinate”](#)).

The Uunits syntax that allows scale factors and offsets to be applied to a unit is not supported by this standard. The application of any scale factors or offsets to data should be indicated by the `scale_factor` and `add_offset` attributes. Use of these attributes for data packing, which is their most important application, is discussed in detail in [Section 8.1, “Packed Data”](#).

Uunits recognizes the following prefixes and their abbreviations.

Table 3.1. Supported Units

| Factor | Prefix | Abbreviation | | Factor | Prefix | Abbreviation |
|--------|-----------|--------------|--|--------|--------|--------------|
| 1e1 | deca,deka | da | | 1e-1 | deci | d |

¹ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/software/udunits/>

| Factor | Prefix | Abbreviation | | Factor | Prefix | Abbreviation |
|--------|--------|--------------|--|--------|--------|--------------|
| 1e2 | hecto | h | | 1e-2 | centi | c |
| 1e3 | kilo | k | | 1e-3 | milli | m |
| 1e6 | mega | M | | 1e-6 | micro | u |
| 1e9 | giga | G | | 1e-9 | nano | n |
| 1e12 | tera | T | | 1e-12 | pico | p |
| 1e15 | peta | P | | 1e-15 | femto | f |
| 1e18 | exa | E | | 1e-18 | atto | a |
| 1e21 | zetta | Z | | 1e-21 | zepto | z |
| 1e24 | yotta | Y | | 1e-24 | yocto | y |

3.2. Long Name

The `long_name` attribute is defined by the NUG to contain a long descriptive name which may, for example, be used for labeling plots. For backwards compatibility with COARDS this attribute is optional. But it is highly recommended that either this or the `standard_name` attribute defined in the next section be provided to make the file self-describing. If a variable has no `long_name` attribute then an application may use, as a default, the `standard_name` if it exists, or the variable name itself.

3.3. Standard Name

A fundamental requirement for exchange of scientific data is the ability to describe precisely the physical quantities being represented. To some extent this is the role of the `long_name` attribute as defined in the NUG. However, usage of `long_name` is completely ad-hoc. For some applications it would be desirable to have a more definitive description of the quantity, which would allow users of data from different sources to determine whether quantities were in fact comparable. For this reason an optional mechanism for uniquely associating each variable with a standard name is provided.

A standard name is associated with a variable via the attribute `standard_name` which takes a string value comprised of a standard name optionally followed by one or more blanks and a standard name modifier (a string value from [Appendix C, Standard Name Modifiers](#)).

The set of permissible standard names is contained in the standard name table. The table entry for each standard name contains the following:

standard name

The name used to identify the physical quantity. A standard name contains no whitespace and is case sensitive.

canonical units

Representative units of the physical quantity. Unless it is dimensionless, a variable with a `standard_name` attribute must have units which are physically equivalent (not necessarily identical) to the canonical units, possibly modified by an operation specified by either the standard name modifier (see below and [Appendix C, Standard Name Modifiers](#)) or by the `cell_methods` attribute (see [Section 7.3, "Cell Methods"](#) and [Appendix E, Cell Methods](#)).

description

The description is meant to clarify the qualifiers of the fundamental quantities such as which surface a quantity is defined on or what the flux sign conventions are. We don't attempt to provide precise definitions of fundamental physical quantities (e.g., temperature) which may be found in the literature.

When appropriate, the table entry also contains the corresponding GRIB parameter code(s) (from ECMWF and NCEP) and AMIP identifiers.

The standard name table is located at <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/documents/cf-standard-names/current/cf-standard-name-table.xml>, written in compliance with the XML format, as described in [Appendix B, *Standard Name Table Format*](#). Knowledge of the XML format is only necessary for application writers who plan to directly access the table. A formatted text version of the table is provided at <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/documents/cf-standard-names/current/cf-standard-name-table.html>, and this table may be consulted in order to find the standard name that should be assigned to a variable.

Standard names by themselves are not always sufficient to describe a quantity. For example, a variable may contain data to which spatial or temporal operations have been applied. Or the data may represent an uncertainty in the measurement of a quantity. These quantity attributes are expressed as modifiers of the standard name. Modifications due to common statistical operations are expressed via the `cell_methods` attribute (see [Section 7.3, “Cell Methods”](#) and [Appendix E, *Cell Methods*](#)). Other types of quantity modifiers are expressed using the optional modifier part of the `standard_name` attribute. The permissible values of these modifiers are given in [Appendix C, *Standard Name Modifiers*](#).

Example 3.1. Use of `standard_name`

```
float psl(lat,lon) ;
  psl:long_name = "mean sea level pressure" ;
  psl:units = "hPa" ;
  psl:standard_name = "air_pressure_at_sea_level" ;
```

The description in the standard name table entry for `air_pressure_at_sea_level` clarifies that "sea level" refers to the mean sea level, which is close to the geoid in sea areas.

Here are lists of equivalences between the CF standard names and the standard names from the [ECMWF GRIB tables](#)², the [NCEP GRIB tables](#)³, and the [PCMDI tables](#)⁴.

3.4. Ancillary Data

When one data variable provides metadata about the individual values of another data variable it may be desirable to express this association by providing a link between the variables. For example, instrument data may have associated measures of uncertainty. The attribute `ancillary_variables` is used to express these types of relationships. It is a string attribute whose value is a blank separated list of variable names. The nature of the relationship between variables associated via `ancillary_variables` must be determined by other attributes. The variables listed by the `ancillary_variables` attribute will often have the standard name of the variable which points to them including a modifier ([Appendix C, *Standard Name Modifiers*](#)) to indicate the relationship.

Example 3.2. Instrument data

```
float q(time) ;
  q:standard_name = "specific_humidity" ;
  q:units = "g/g" ;
  q:ancillary_variables = "q_error_limit q_detection_limit" ;
```

² <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/documents/cf-standard-names/ecmwf-grib-mapping>

³ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/documents/cf-standard-names/ncep-grib-code-cf-standard-name-mapping>

⁴ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/documents/cf-standard-names/pcmdi-name-cf-standard-name-mapping>

```

float q_error_limit(time)
  q_error_limit:standard_name = "specific_humidity_standard_error" ;
  q_error_limit:units = "g/g" ;
float q_detection_limit(time)
  q_detection_limit:standard_name = "specific_humidity_detection_minimum" ;
  q_detection_limit:units = "g/g" ;

```

3.5. Flags

The attributes `flag_values`, `flag_masks` and `flag_meanings` are intended to make variables that contain flag values self describing. Status codes and Boolean (binary) condition flags may be expressed with different combinations of `flag_values` and `flag_masks` attribute definitions.

The `flag_values` and `flag_meanings` attributes describe a status flag consisting of mutually exclusive coded values. The `flag_values` attribute is the same type as the variable to which it is attached, and contains a list of the possible flag values. The `flag_meanings` attribute is a string whose value is a blank separated list of descriptive words or phrases, one for each flag value. If multi-word phrases are used to describe the flag values, then the words within a phrase should be connected with underscores. The following example illustrates the use of flag values to express a speed quality with an enumerated status code.

Example 3.3. A flag variable, using `flag_values`

```

byte current_speed_qc(time, depth, lat, lon) ;
  current_speed_qc:long_name = "Current Speed Quality" ;
  current_speed_qc:standard_name = "sea_water_speed_status_flag" ;
  current_speed_qc:_FillValue = -128b ;
  current_speed_qc:valid_range = 0b, 2b-127b, 127b ;
  current_speed_qc:flag_values = 0b, 1b, 2b ;
  current_speed_qc:flag_meanings = "quality_good sensor_nonfunctional
                                   outside_valid_range" ;

```

The `flag_masks` and `flag_meanings` attributes describe a number of independent Boolean conditions using bit field notation by setting unique bits in each `flag_masks` value. The `flag_masks` attribute is the same type as the variable to which it is attached, and contains a list of values matching unique bit fields. The `flag_meanings` attribute is defined as above, one for each `flag_masks` value. A flagged condition is identified by performing a bitwise AND of the variable value and each `flag_masks` value; a non-zero result indicates a true condition. Thus, any or all of the flagged conditions may be true, depending on the variable bit settings. The following example illustrates the use of `flag_masks` to express six sensor status conditions.

Example 3.4. A flag variable, using `flag_masks`

```

byte sensor_status_qc(time, depth, lat, lon) ;
  sensor_status_qc:long_name = "Sensor Status" ;
  sensor_status_qc:_FillValue = 0b ;
  sensor_status_qc:valid_range = 1b, 63b ;
  sensor_status_qc:flag_masks = 1b, 2b, 4b, 8b, 16b, 32b ;
  sensor_status_qc:flag_meanings = "low_battery processor_fault
                                   memory_fault disk_fault
                                   software_fault
                                   maintenance_required" ;

```

The `flag_masks`, `flag_values` and `flag_meanings` attributes, used together, describe a blend of independent Boolean conditions and enumerated status codes. The `flag_masks` and `flag_values` attributes are both the same type as the variable to which they are attached. A flagged condition is identified by a bitwise AND of the variable value and each `flag_masks` value; a result that matches the `flag_values` value indicates a `true` condition. Repeated `flag_masks` define a bit field mask that identifies a number of status conditions with different `flag_values`. The `flag_meanings` attribute is defined as above, one for each `flag_masks` bit field and `flag_values` definition. Each `flag_values` and `flag_masks` value must coincide with a `flag_meanings` value. The following example illustrates the use of `flag_masks` and `flag_values` to express two sensor status conditions and one enumerated status code.

Example 3.5. A flag variable, using `flag_masks` and `flag_values`

```
byte sensor_status_qc(time, depth, lat, lon) ;
  sensor_status_qc:long_name = "Sensor Status" ;
  sensor_status_qc:_FillValue = 0b ;
  sensor_status_qc:valid_range = 1b, 15b ;
  sensor_status_qc:flag_masks = 1b, 2b, 12b, 12b, 12b ;
  sensor_status_qc:flag_values = 1b, 2b, 4b, 8b, 12b ;
  sensor_status_qc:flag_meanings =
    "low_battery
     hardware_fault
     offline_mode calibration_mode maintenance_mode" ;
```

In this case, mutually exclusive values are blended with Boolean values to maximize use of the available bits in a flag value. The table below represents the four binary digits (bits) expressed by the `sensor_status_qc` variable in the previous example.

Bit 0 and Bit 1 are Boolean values indicating a low battery condition and a hardware fault, respectively. The next two bits (Bit 2 and Bit 3) express an enumeration indicating abnormal sensor operating modes. Thus, if Bit 0 is set, the battery is low and if Bit 1 is set, there is a hardware fault - independent of the current sensor operating mode.

Table 3.2. Flag Variable Bits (from Example)

| Bit 3 (MSB) | Bit 2 | Bit 1 | Bit 0 (LSB) |
|----------------|-------|-----------|----------------|
| | | H/W Fault | Low Batt |

The remaining bits (Bit 2 and Bit 3) are decoded as follows:

Table 3.3. Flag Variable Bit 2 and Bit 3 (from Example)

| Bit 3 | Bit 2 | Mode |
|-------|-------|------------------|
| 0 | 1 | offline_mode |
| 1 | 0 | calibration_mode |
| 1 | 1 | maintenance_mode |

The "12b" flag mask is repeated in the `sensor_status_qc` `flag_masks` definition to explicitly declare the recommended bit field masks to repeatedly AND with the variable value while searching for matching enumerated values. An application determines if any of the conditions declared in the `flag_meanings` list are `true` by simply iterating

through each of the `flag_masks` and AND'ing them with the variable. When a result is equal to the corresponding `flag_values` element, that condition is `true`. The repeated `flag_masks` enable a simple mechanism for clients to detect all possible conditions.

Chapter 4. Coordinate Types

Four types of coordinates receive special treatment by these conventions: latitude, longitude, vertical, and time. We continue to support the special role that the `units` and `positive` attributes play in the COARDS convention to identify coordinate type. We extend COARDS by providing explicit definitions of dimensionless vertical coordinates. The definitions are associated with a coordinate variable via the `standard_name` and `formula_terms` attributes. For backwards compatibility with COARDS use of these attributes is not required, but is strongly recommended.

Because identification of a coordinate type by its units is complicated by requiring the use of an external software package [UDUNITS], we provide two optional methods that yield a direct identification. The attribute `axis` may be attached to a coordinate variable and given one of the values X, Y, Z or T which stand for a longitude, latitude, vertical, or time axis respectively. Alternatively the `standard_name` attribute may be used for direct identification. But note that these optional attributes are in addition to the required COARDS metadata.

Coordinate types other than latitude, longitude, vertical, and time are allowed. To identify generic spatial coordinates we recommend that the `axis` attribute be attached to these coordinates and given one of the values X, Y or Z. The values X and Y for the axis attribute should be used to identify horizontal coordinate variables. If both X- and Y-axis are identified, X-Y-up should define a right-handed coordinate system, i.e. rotation from the positive X direction to the positive Y direction is anticlockwise if viewed from above. We strongly recommend that coordinate variables be used for all coordinate types whenever they are applicable.

The methods of identifying coordinate types described in this section apply both to coordinate variables and to auxiliary coordinate variables named by the `coordinates` attribute (see [Chapter 5, *Coordinate Systems*](#)).

4.1. Latitude Coordinate

Variables representing latitude must always explicitly include the `units` attribute; there is no default value. The `units` attribute will be a string formatted as per the `udunits.dat`¹ file. The recommended unit of latitude is `degrees_north`. Also acceptable are `degree_north`, `degree_N`, `degrees_N`, `degreeN`, and `degreesN`.

Example 4.1. Latitude axis

```
float lat(lat) ;
  lat:long_name = "latitude" ;
  lat:units = "degrees_north" ;
  lat:standard_name = "latitude" ;
```

Application writers should note that the Udunits package does not recognize the directionality implied by the "north" part of the unit specification. It only recognizes its size, i.e., 1 degree is defined to be $\pi/180$ radians. Hence, determination that a coordinate is a latitude type should be done via a string match between the given unit and one of the acceptable forms of `degrees_north`.

Optionally, the latitude type may be indicated additionally by providing the `standard_name` attribute with the value `latitude`, and/or the `axis` attribute with the value Y.

Coordinates of latitude with respect to a rotated pole should be given units of `degrees`, not `degrees_north` or equivalents, because applications which use the units to identify axes would have no means of distinguishing such an axis from real latitude, and might draw incorrect coastlines, for instance.

¹ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/software/udunits/>

4.2. Longitude Coordinate

Variables representing longitude must always explicitly include the `units` attribute; there is no default value. The `units` attribute will be a string formatted as per the `udunits.dat`² file. The recommended unit of longitude is `degrees_east`. Also acceptable are `degree_east`, `degree_E`, `degrees_E`, `degreeE`, and `degreesE`.

Example 4.2. Longitude axis

```
float lon(lon) ;
  lon:long_name = "longitude" ;
  lon:units = "degrees_east" ;
  lon:standard_name = "longitude" ;
```

Application writers should note that the Uduints package has limited recognition of the directionality implied by the "east" part of the unit specification. It defines `degrees_east` to be $\pi/180$ radians, and hence equivalent to `degrees_north`. We recommend the determination that a coordinate is a longitude type should be done via a string match between the given unit and one of the acceptable forms of `degrees_east`.

Optionally, the longitude type may be indicated additionally by providing the `standard_name` attribute with the value `longitude`, and/or the `axis` attribute with the value `X`.

Coordinates of longitude with respect to a rotated pole should be given units of `degrees`, not `degrees_east` or equivalents, because applications which use the units to identify axes would have no means of distinguishing such an axis from real longitude, and might draw incorrect coastlines, for instance.

4.3. Vertical (Height or Depth) Coordinate

Variables representing dimensional height or depth axes must always explicitly include the `units` attribute; there is no default value.

The direction of positive (i.e., the direction in which the coordinate values are increasing), whether up or down, cannot in all cases be inferred from the units. The direction of positive is useful for applications displaying the data. For this reason the attribute `positive` as defined in the COARDS standard is required if the vertical axis units are not a valid unit of pressure (a determination which can be made using the `udunits` routine, `utScan`) -- otherwise its inclusion is optional. The `positive` attribute may have the value `up` or `down` (case insensitive). This attribute may be applied to either coordinate variables or auxillary coordinate variables that contain vertical coordinate data.

For example, if an oceanographic netCDF file encodes the depth of the surface as 0 and the depth of 1000 meters as 1000 then the axis would use attributes as follows:

```
axis_name:units = "meters" ;
axis_name:positive = "down" ;
```

If, on the other hand, the depth of 1000 meters were represented as -1000 then the value of the `positive` attribute would have been `up`. If the `units` attribute value is a valid pressure unit the default value of the `positive` attribute is `down`.

A vertical coordinate will be identifiable by:

² <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/software/udunits/>

- units of pressure; or
- the presence of the positive attribute with a value of up or down (case insensitive).

Optionally, the vertical type may be indicated additionally by providing the `standard_name` attribute with an appropriate value, and/or the `axis` attribute with the value `Z`.

4.3.1. Dimensional Vertical Coordinate

The `units` attribute for dimensional coordinates will be a string formatted as per the `udunits.dat`³ file. The acceptable units for vertical (depth or height) coordinate variables are:

- units of pressure as listed in the file `udunits.dat`. For vertical axes the most commonly used of these include `bar`, `millibar`, `decibar`, `atmosphere (atm)`, `pascal (Pa)`, and `hPa`.
- units of length as listed in the file `udunits.dat`. For vertical axes the most commonly used of these include `meter (metre, m)`, and `kilometer (km)`.
- other units listed in the file `udunits.dat` that may under certain circumstances reference vertical position such as units of density or temperature.

Plural forms are also acceptable.

4.3.2. Dimensionless Vertical Coordinate

The `units` attribute is not required for dimensionless coordinates. For backwards compatibility with COARDS we continue to allow the `units` attribute to take one of the values: `level`, `layer`, or `sigma_level`. These values are not recognized by the Uduits package, and are considered a deprecated feature in the CF standard.

For dimensionless vertical coordinates we extend the COARDS standard by making use of the `standard_name` attribute to associate a coordinate with its definition from [Appendix D, *Dimensionless Vertical Coordinates*](#). The definition provides a mapping between the dimensionless coordinate values and dimensional values that can positively and uniquely indicate the location of the data. A new attribute, `formula_terms`, is used to associate terms in the definitions with variables in a netCDF file. To maintain backwards compatibility with COARDS the use of these attributes is not required, but is strongly recommended.

Example 4.3. Atmosphere sigma coordinate

```
float lev(lev) ;
  lev:long_name = "sigma at layer midpoints" ;
  lev:positive = "down" ;
  lev:standard_name = "atmosphere_sigma_coordinate" ;
  lev:formula_terms = "sigma: lev ps: PS ptop: PTOP" ;
```

In this example the `standard_name` value `atmosphere_sigma_coordinate` identifies the following definition from [Appendix D, *Dimensionless Vertical Coordinates*](#) which specifies how to compute pressure at gridpoint (n, k, j, i) where j and i are horizontal indices, k is a vertical index, and n is a time index:

$$p(n, k, j, i) = p_{top} + \text{sigma}(k) * (ps(n, j, i) - p_{top})$$

³ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/software/udunits/>

The `formula_terms` attribute associates the variable `lev` with the term `sigma`, the variable `PS` with the term `ps`, and the variable `PTOP` with the term `p_top`. Thus the pressure at gridpoint (n, k, j, i) would be calculated by

$$p(n, k, j, i) = \text{PTOP} + \text{lev}(k) * (\text{PS}(n, j, i) - \text{PTOP})$$

4.4. Time Coordinate

Variables representing time must always explicitly include the `units` attribute; there is no default value. The `units` attribute takes a string value formatted as per the recommendations in the Uduunits package [UDUNITS]. The following excerpt from the Uduunits documentation explains the time unit encoding by example:

The specification:

```
seconds since 1992-10-8 15:15:42.5 -6:00
```

indicates seconds since October 8th, 1992 at 3 hours, 15 minutes and 42.5 seconds in the afternoon in the time zone which is six hours to the west of Coordinated Universal Time (i.e. Mountain Daylight Time). The time zone specification can also be written without a colon using one or two-digits (indicating hours) or three or four digits (indicating hours and minutes).

The acceptable units for time are listed in the `udunits.dat`⁴ file. The most commonly used of these strings (and their abbreviations) includes `day (d)`, `hour (hr, h)`, `minute (min)` and `second (sec, s)`. Plural forms are also acceptable. The reference time string (appearing after the identifier `since`) may include date alone; date and time; or date, time, and time zone. The reference time is required. A reference time in year 0 has a special meaning (see Section 7.4, “Climatological Statistics”).

Note: if the time zone is omitted the default is UTC, and if both time and time zone are omitted the default is 00:00:00 UTC.

We recommend that the unit `year` be used with caution. The Uduunits package defines a `year` to be exactly 365.242198781 days (the interval between 2 successive passages of the sun through vernal equinox). *It is not a calendar year.* Uduunits includes the following definitions for years: a `common_year` is 365 days, a `leap_year` is 366 days, a `Julian_year` is 365.25 days, and a `Gregorian_year` is 365.2425 days.

For similar reasons the unit `month`, which is defined in `udunits.dat`⁵ to be exactly `year/12`, should also be used with caution.

Example 4.4. Time axis

```
double time(time) ;
    time:long_name = "time" ;
    time:units = "days since 1990-1-1 0:0:0" ;
```

⁴ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/software/udunits/>

⁵ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/software/udunits/>

A time coordinate is identifiable from its units string alone. The Udunits routines `utScan()` and `utIsTime()` can be used to make this determination.

Optionally, the time coordinate may be indicated additionally by providing the `standard_name` attribute with an appropriate value, and/or the `axis` attribute with the value `T`.

4.4.1. Calendar

In order to calculate a new date and time given a base date, base time and a time increment one must know what calendar to use. For this purpose we recommend that the calendar be specified by the attribute `calendar` which is assigned to the time coordinate variable. The values currently defined for `calendar` are:

`gregorian` or `standard`

Mixed Gregorian/Julian calendar as defined by Udunits. *This is the default.*

`proleptic_gregorian`

A Gregorian calendar extended to dates before 1582-10-15. That is, a year is a leap year if either (i) it is divisible by 4 but not by 100 or (ii) it is divisible by 400.

`noleap` or `365_day`

Gregorian calendar without leap years, i.e., all years are 365 days long.

`all_leap` or `366_day`

Gregorian calendar with every year being a leap year, i.e., all years are 366 days long.

`360_day`

All years are 360 days divided into 30 day months.

`julian`

Julian calendar.

`none`

No calendar.

The `calendar` attribute may be set to `none` in climate experiments that simulate a fixed time of year. The time of year is indicated by the date in the reference time of the `units` attribute. The time coordinate that might apply in a perpetual July experiment are given in the following example.

Example 4.5. Perpetual time axis

```
variables:
  double time(time) ;
    time:long_name = "time" ;
    time:units = "days since 1-7-15 0:0:0" ;
    time:calendar = "none" ;
data:
  time = 0., 1., 2., ...;
```

Here, all days simulate the conditions of 15th July, so it does not make sense to give them different dates. The time coordinates are interpreted as 0, 1, 2, etc. days since the start of the experiment.

If none of the calendars defined above applies (e.g., calendars appropriate to a different paleoclimate era), a non-standard calendar can be defined. The lengths of each month are explicitly defined with the `month_lengths` attribute of the time axis:

`month_lengths`

A vector of size 12, specifying the number of days in the months from January to December (in a non-leap year).

If leap years are included, then two other attributes of the time axis should also be defined:

`leap_year`

An example of a leap year. It is assumed that all years that differ from this year by a multiple of four are also leap years. If this attribute is absent, it is assumed there are no leap years.

`leap_month`

A value in the range 1-12, specifying which month is lengthened by a day in leap years (1=January). If this attribute is not present, February (2) is assumed. This attribute is ignored if `leap_year` is not specified.

The `calendar` attribute is not required when a non-standard calendar is being used. It is sufficient to define the calendar using the `month_lengths` attribute, along with `leap_year`, and `leap_month` as appropriate. However, the `calendar` attribute is allowed to take non-standard values and in that case defining the non-standard calendar using the appropriate attributes is required.

Example 4.6. Paleoclimate time axis

```
double time(time) ;
  time:long_name = "time" ;
  time:units = "days since 1-1-1 0:0:0" ;
  time:calendar = "126 kyr B.P." ;
  time:month_lengths = 34, 31, 32, 30, 29, 27, 28, 28, 28, 32, 32, 34 ;
```

The mixed Gregorian/Julian calendar used by Udunits is explained in the following excerpt from the `udunits(3)` man page:

```
The udunits(3) package uses a mixed Gregorian/Julian calendar system. Dates prior to 1582-10-15 are assumed to use the Julian calendar, which was introduced by Julius Caesar in 46 BCE and is based on a year that is exactly 365.25 days long. Dates on and after 1582-10-15 are assumed to use the Gregorian calendar, which was introduced on that date and is based on a year that is exactly 365.2425 days long. (A year is actually approximately 365.242198781 days long.) Seemingly strange behavior of the udunits(3) package can result if a user-given time interval includes the changeover date. For example, utCalendar() and utInvCalendar() can be used to show that 1582-10-15 *preceded* 1582-10-14 by 9 days.
```

Due to problems caused by the discontinuity in the default mixed Gregorian/Julian calendar, we strongly recommend that this calendar should only be used when the time coordinate does not cross the discontinuity. For time coordinates that do cross the discontinuity the `proleptic_gregorian` calendar should be used instead.

Chapter 5. Coordinate Systems

A variable's spatiotemporal dimensions are used to locate data values in time and space. This is accomplished by associating these dimensions with the relevant set of latitude, longitude, vertical, and time coordinates. This section presents two methods for making that association: the use of *coordinate variables*, and the use of *auxiliary coordinate variables*.

All of a variable's dimensions that are latitude, longitude, vertical, or time dimensions (see [Section 1.2, “Terminology”](#)) must have corresponding coordinate variables, i.e., one-dimensional variables with the same name as the dimension (see examples in [Chapter 4, *Coordinate Types*](#)). This is the only method of associating dimensions with coordinates that is supported by [COARDS].

All of a variable's spatiotemporal dimensions that are not latitude, longitude, vertical, or time dimensions are required to be associated with the relevant latitude, longitude, vertical, or time coordinates via the new `coordinates` attribute of the variable. The value of the `coordinates` attribute is a *blank separated list of the names of auxiliary coordinate variables*. There is no restriction on the order in which the auxiliary coordinate variables appear in the `coordinates` attribute string. The dimensions of an auxiliary coordinate variable must be a subset of the dimensions of the variable with which the coordinate is associated (an exception is label coordinates ([Section 6.1, “Labels”](#)) which contain a dimension for maximum string length). We recommend that the name of a multidimensional coordinate variable should not match the name of any of its dimensions because that precludes supplying a coordinate variable for the dimension. This practice also avoids potential bugs in applications that determine coordinate variables by only checking for a name match between a dimension and a variable and not checking that the variable is one dimensional.

The use of coordinate variables is required whenever they are applicable. That is, auxiliary coordinate variables may not be used as the only way to identify latitude and longitude coordinates that could be identified using coordinate variables. This is both to enhance conformance to COARDS and to facilitate the use of generic applications that recognize the NUG convention for coordinate variables. An application that is trying to find the latitude coordinate of a variable should always look first to see if any of the variable's dimensions correspond to a latitude coordinate variable. If the latitude coordinate is not found this way, then the auxiliary coordinate variables listed by the `coordinates` attribute should be checked. Note that it is permissible, but optional, to list coordinate variables as well as auxiliary coordinate variables in the `coordinates` attribute. The `axis` attribute is not allowed for auxiliary coordinate variables. Auxiliary coordinate variables which lie on the horizontal surface can be identified as such by their dimensions being horizontal. Horizontal dimensions are those whose coordinate variables have an `axis` attribute of X or Y, or a `units` attribute indicating latitude and longitude (see [Chapter 4, *Coordinate Types*](#)).

If the coordinate variables for a horizontal grid are not longitude and latitude, it is recommended that they be supplied *in addition* to the required coordinates. For example, the Cartesian coordinates of a map projection should be supplied as coordinate variables in addition to the required two-dimensional latitude and longitude variables that are identified via the `coordinates` attribute. The use of the `axis` attribute with values X and Y is recommended for the coordinate variables (see [Chapter 4, *Coordinate Types*](#)).

It is sometimes not practical to specify the latitude-longitude location of data which is representative of geographic regions with complex boundaries. For this purpose, provision is made in [Section 6.1.1, “Geographic Regions”](#) for indicating the region by a standardized name.

5.1. Independent Latitude, Longitude, Vertical, and Time Axes

When each of a variable's spatiotemporal dimensions is a latitude, longitude, vertical, or time dimension, then each axis is identified by a coordinate variable.

Example 5.1. Independent coordinate variables

```
dimensions:
  lat = 18 ;
  lon = 36 ;
  pres = 15 ;
  time = 4 ;
variables:
  float xwind(time,pres,lat,lon) ;
  xwind:long_name = "zonal wind" ;
  xwind:units = "m/s" ;
  float lon(lon) ;
  lon:long_name = "longitude" ;
  lon:units = "degrees_east" ;
  float lat(lat) ;
  lat:long_name = "latitude" ;
  lat:units = "degrees_north" ;
  float pres(pres) ;
  pres:long_name = "pressure" ;
  pres:units = "hPa" ;
  double time(time) ;
  time:long_name = "time" ;
  time:units = "days since 1990-1-1 0:0:0" ;
```

`xwind(n,k,j,i)` is associated with the coordinate values `lon(i)`, `lat(j)`, `pres(k)`, and `time(n)`.

5.2. Two-Dimensional Latitude, Longitude, Coordinate Variables

The latitude and longitude coordinates of a horizontal grid that was not defined as a Cartesian product of latitude and longitude axes, can sometimes be represented using two-dimensional coordinate variables. These variables are identified as coordinates by use of the `coordinates` attribute.

Example 5.2. Two-dimensional coordinate variables

```
dimensions:
  xc = 128 ;
  yc = 64 ;
  lev = 18 ;
variables:
  float T(lev,yc,xc) ;
  T:long_name = "temperature" ;
  T:units = "K" ;
  T:coordinates = "lon lat" ;
  float xc(xc) ;
  xc:axis = "X" ;
  xc:long_name = "x-coordinate in Cartesian system" ;
  xc:units = "m" ;
  float yc(yc) ;
  yc:axis = "Y" ;
```

```

    yc:long_name = "y-coordinate in Cartesian system" ;
    yc:units = "m" ;
float lev(lev) ;
    lev:long_name = "pressure level" ;
    lev:units = "hPa" ;
float lon(yc,xc) ;
    lon:long_name = "longitude" ;
    lon:units = "degrees_east" ;
float lat(yc,xc) ;
    lat:long_name = "latitude" ;
    lat:units = "degrees_north" ;

```

$T(k, j, i)$ is associated with the coordinate values $lon(j, i)$, $lat(j, i)$, and $lev(k)$. The vertical coordinate is represented by the coordinate variable $lev(lev)$ and the latitude and longitude coordinates are represented by the auxiliary coordinate variables $lat(yc, xc)$ and $lon(yc, xc)$ which are identified by the `coordinates` attribute.

Note that coordinate variables are also defined for the `xc` and `yc` dimensions. This facilitates processing of this data by generic applications that don't recognize the multidimensional latitude and longitude coordinates.

5.3. Reduced Horizontal Grid

A "reduced" longitude-latitude grid is one in which the points are arranged along constant latitude lines with the number of points on a latitude line decreasing toward the poles. Storing this type of gridded data in two-dimensional arrays wastes space, and results in the presence of missing values in the 2D coordinate variables. We recommend that this type of gridded data be stored using the compression scheme described in [Section 8.2, "Compression by Gathering"](#). Compression by gathering preserves structure by storing a set of indices that allows an application to easily scatter the compressed data back to two-dimensional arrays. The compressed latitude and longitude auxiliary coordinate variables are identified by the `coordinates` attribute.

Example 5.3. Reduced horizontal grid

```

dimensions:
    londim = 128 ;
    latdim = 64 ;
    rgrid = 6144 ;
variables:
    float PS(rgrid) ;
        PS:long_name = "surface pressure" ;
        PS:units = "Pa" ;
        PS:coordinates = "lon lat" ;
    float lon(rgrid) ;
        lon:long_name = "longitude" ;
        lon:units = "degrees_east" ;
    float lat(rgrid) ;
        lat:long_name = "latitude" ;
        lat:units = "degrees_north" ;
    int rgrid(rgrid);
        rgrid:compress = "latdim londim";

```

$PS(n)$ is associated with the coordinate values $lon(n)$, $lat(n)$. Compressed grid index (n) would be assigned to 2D index (j, i) (C index conventions) where

```
j = rgrid(n) / 128
i = rgrid(n) - 128*j
```

Notice that even if an application does not recognize the `compress` attribute, the grids stored in this format can still be handled, by an application that recognizes the `coordinates` attribute.

5.4. Timeseries of Station Data

To represent data at scattered points it is convenient to use a variable with one dimension to represent the measurement locations. Auxiliary coordinate variables are used to associate a single spatial dimension with multiple independent coordinates.

Example 5.4. Timeseries of station data

```
dimensions:
  station = 10 ; // measurement locations
  pressure = 11 ; // pressure levels
  time = UNLIMITED ;
variables:
  float humidity(time,pressure,station) ;
    humidity:long_name = "specific humidity" ;
    humidity:coordinates = "lat lon" ;
  double time(time) ;
    time:long_name = "time of measurement" ;
    time:units = "days since 1970-01-01 00:00:00" ;
  float lon(station) ;
    lon:long_name = "station longitude" ;
    lon:units = "degrees_east" ;
  float lat(station) ;
    lat:long_name = "station latitude" ;
    lat:units = "degrees_north" ;
  float pressure(pressure) ;
    pressure:long_name = "pressure" ;
    pressure:units = "hPa" ;
```

`humidity(n,k,i)` is associated with the coordinate values `time(n)`, `pressure(k)`, `lat(i)`, and `lon(i)`.

5.5. Trajectories

A possible representation of the spatiotemporal locations of measurements along a flight path is to use time to parameterize the trajectory and use auxiliary coordinate variables to provide the spatial locations.

Example 5.5. Trajectories

```
dimensions:
  time = 1000 ;
variables:
  float O3(time) ;
```

```

O3:long_name = "ozone concentration" ;
O3:units = "1e-9" ;
O3:coordinates = "lon lat z" ;
double time(time) ;
  time:long_name = "time" ;
  time:units = "days since 1970-01-01 00:00:00" ;
float lon(time) ;
  lon:long_name = "longitude" ;
  lon:units = "degrees_east" ;
float lat(time) ;
  lat:long_name = "latitude" ;
  lat:units = "degrees_north" ;
float z(time) ;
  z:long_name = "height above mean sea level" ;
  z:units = "km" ;
  z:positive = "up" ;

```

O3(n) is associated with the coordinate values time(n), z(n), lat(n), and lon(n).

5.6. Grid Mappings and Projections Horizontal Coordinate Reference Systems, Grid Mappings, and Projections

When the coordinate variables for a horizontal grid are not longitude and latitude, it is required that the true latitude and longitude coordinates be supplied via the `coordinates` attribute. If in addition it is desired to describe the mapping between the given coordinate variables and the true latitude and longitude coordinates, the attribute `grid_mapping` may be used to supply this description. This attribute is attached to data variables so that variables with different mappings may be present in a single file. The attribute takes a string value which is the name of another variable in the file that provides the description of the mapping via a collection of attached attributes. This variable is called a *grid mapping variable* and is of arbitrary type since it contains no data. Its purpose is to act as a container for the attributes that define the mapping. The one attribute that all grid mapping variables must have is `grid_mapping_name` which takes a string value that contains the mapping's name. The other attributes that define a specific mapping depend on the value of `grid_mapping_name`. The valid values of `grid_mapping_name` along with the attributes that provide specific map parameter values are described in [Appendix F, Grid Mappings](#).

When the coordinate variables for a horizontal grid are longitude and latitude, a grid mapping variable with `grid_mapping_name` of `latitude_longitude` may be used to specify the ellipsoid and prime meridian.

In order to make use of a grid mapping to directly calculate latitude and longitude values it is necessary to associate the coordinate variables with the independent variables of the mapping. This is done by assigning a `standard_name` to the coordinate variable. The appropriate values of the `standard_name` depend on the grid mapping and are given in [Appendix F, Grid Mappings](#).

Example 5.6. Rotated pole grid

```

dimensions:
  rlon = 128 ;
  rlat = 64 ;
  lev = 18 ;
variables:

```



```

float T(lev,rlat,r lon) ;
  T:long_name = "temperature" ;
  T:units = "K" ;
  T:coordinates = "lon lat" ;
  T:grid_mapping = "rotated_pole" ;
char rotated_pole
  rotated_pole:grid_mapping_name = "rotated_latitude_longitude" ;
  rotated_pole:grid_north_pole_latitude = 32.5 ;
  rotated_pole:grid_north_pole_longitude = 170. ;
float rlon(rlon) ;
  rlon:long_name = "longitude in rotated pole grid" ;
  rlon:units = "degrees" ;
  rlon:standard_name = "grid_longitude";
float rlat(rlat) ;
  rlat:long_name = "latitude in rotated pole grid" ;
  rlat:units = "degrees" ;
  rlon:standard_name = "grid_latitude";
float lev(lev) ;
  lev:long_name = "pressure level" ;
  lev:units = "hPa" ;
float lon(rlat,r lon) ;
  lon:long_name = "longitude" ;
  lon:units = "degrees_east" ;
float lat(rlat,r lon) ;
  lat:long_name = "latitude" ;
  lat:units = "degrees_north" ;

```

A CF compliant application can determine that `rlon` and `rlat` are longitude and latitude values in the rotated grid by recognizing the standard names `grid_longitude` and `grid_latitude`. Note that the units of the rotated longitude and latitude axes are given as degrees. This should prevent a COARDS compliant application from mistaking the variables `rlon` and `rlat` to be actual longitude and latitude coordinates. The entries for these names in the standard name table indicate the appropriate sign conventions for the units of degrees.

Example 5.7. Lambert conformal projection

```

dimensions:
  y = 228;
  x = 306;
  time = 41;

variables:
  int Lambert_Conformal;
    Lambert_Conformal:grid_mapping_name = "lambert_conformal_conic";
    Lambert_Conformal:standard_parallel = 25.0;
    Lambert_Conformal:longitude_of_central_meridian = 265.0;
    Lambert_Conformal:latitude_of_projection_origin = 25.0;
  double y(y);
    y:units = "km";
    y:long_name = "y coordinate of projection";
    y:standard_name = "projection_y_coordinate";
  double x(x);
    x:units = "km";

```

```
x:long_name = "x coordinate of projection";
x:standard_name = "projection_x_coordinate";
double lat(y, x);
  lat:units = "degrees_north";
  lat:long_name = "latitude coordinate";
  lat:standard_name = "latitude";
double lon(y, x);
  lon:units = "degrees_east";
  lon:long_name = "longitude coordinate";
  lon:standard_name = "longitude";
int time(time);
  time:long_name = "forecast time";
  time:units = "hours since 2004-06-23T22:00:00Z";
float Temperature(time, y, x);
  Temperature:units = "K";
  Temperature:long_name = "Temperature @ surface";
  Temperature:missing_value = 9999.0;
  Temperature:coordinates = "lat lon";
  Temperature:grid_mapping = "Lambert_Conformal";
```

An application can determine that `x` and `y` are the projection coordinates by recognizing the standard names `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate`. The grid mapping variable `Lambert_Conformal` contains the mapping parameters as attributes, and is associated with the `Temperature` variable via its `grid_mapping` attribute.

Example 5.8. Latitude and longitude on a spherical Earth

```
dimensions:
  lat = 18 ;
  lon = 36 ;
variables:
  double lat(lat) ;
  double lon(lon) ;
  float temp(lat, lon) ;
    temp:long_name = "temperature" ;
    temp:units = "K" ;
    temp:grid_mapping = "crs" ;
  int crs ;
    crs:grid_mapping_name = "latitude_longitude"
    crs:semi_major_axis = 6371000.0 ;
    crs:inverse_flattening = 0 ;
```

Example 5.9. Latitude and longitude on the WGS 1984 datum

```
dimensions:
  lat = 18 ;
  lon = 36 ;
variables:
  double lat(lat) ;
  double lon(lon) ;
```

```
float temp(lat, lon) ;
  temp:long_name = "temperature" ;
  temp:units = "K" ;
  temp:grid_mapping = "crs" ;
int crs ;
  crs:grid_mapping_name = "latitude_longitude" ;
  crs:longitude_of_prime_meridian = 0.0 ;
  crs:semi_major_axis = 6378137.0 ;
  crs:inverse_flattening = 298.257223563 ;
```

Example 5.10. British National Grid

```
dimensions:
  lat = 648 ;
  lon = 648 ;
  y = 18 ;
  x = 36 ;
variables:
  double x(x) ;
  x:standard_name = "projection_x_coordinate" ;
  x:units = "m" ;
  double y(y) ;
  y:standard_name = "projection_y_coordinate" ;
  y:units = "m" ;
  double lat(y, x) ;
  double lon(y, x) ;
  float temp(y, x) ;
  temp:long_name = "temperature" ;
  temp:units = "K" ;
  temp:coordinates = "lat lon" ;
  temp:grid_mapping = "crs" ;
  int crs ;
  crs:grid_mapping_name = "transverse_mercator" ;
  crs:semi_major_axis = 6377563.396 ;
  crs:semi_minor_axis = 6356256.910 ;
  crs:inverse_flattening = 299.3249646 ;
  crs:latitude_of_projection_origin = 49.0 ;
  crs:longitude_of_projection_origin = -2.0 ;
  crs:false_easting = 400000.0 ;
  crs:false_northing = -100000.0 ;
  crs:scale_factor_at_projection_origin = 0.9996012717 ;
```

5.7. Scalar Coordinate Variables

When a variable has an associated coordinate which is single-valued, that coordinate may be represented as a scalar variable. Since there is no associated dimension these scalar coordinate variables should be attached to a data variable via the `coordinates` attribute.

Under COARDS the method of providing a single valued coordinate was to add a dimension of size one to the variable, and supply the corresponding coordinate variable. The new scalar coordinate variable is a convenience feature which

avoids adding size one dimensions to variables. Scalar coordinate variables have the same information content and can be used in the same contexts as a size one coordinate variable. Note however that use of this feature with a latitude, longitude, vertical, or time coordinate will inhibit COARDS conforming applications from recognizing them.

Once a name is used for a scalar coordinate variable it can not be used for a 1D coordinate variable. For this reason we strongly recommend against using a name for a scalar coordinate variable that matches the name of any dimension in the file.

Example 5.11. Multiple forecasts from a single analysis

```
dimensions:
  lat = 180 ;
  lon = 360 ;
  time = UNLIMITED ;
variables:
  double atime
    atime:standard_name = "forecast_reference_time" ;
    atime:units = "hours since 1999-01-01 00:00" ;
  double time(time);
    time:standard_name = "time" ;
    time:units = "hours since 1999-01-01 00:00" ;
  double lon(lon) ;
    lon:long_name = "station longitude";
    lon:units = "degrees_east";
  double lat(lat) ;
    lat:long_name = "station latitude" ;
    lat:units = "degrees_north" ;
  double p500
    p500:long_name = "pressure" ;
    p500:units = "hPa" ;
    p500:positive = "down" ;
  float height(time,lat,lon);
    height:long_name = "geopotential height" ;
    height:standard_name = "geopotential_height" ;
    height:units = "m" ;
    height:coordinates = "atime p500" ;
data:
  time = 6., 12., 18., 24. ;
  atime = 0. ;
  p500 = 500. ;
```

In this example both the analysis time and the single pressure level are represented using scalar coordinate variables. The analysis time is identified by the standard name "forecast_reference_time" while the valid time of the forecast is identified by the standard name "time".

Chapter 6. Labels and Alternative Coordinates

6.1. Labels

The previous section contained several examples in which measurements from scattered sites were grouped using a single dimension. Coordinates of the site locations can be provided using auxiliary coordinate variables, but it is often desirable to identify measurement sites by name, or some other unique string.

The list of string identifiers plays an analogous role to a coordinate variable, hence we have chosen to use the `coordinates` attribute to provide the name of the variable that contains the string array. An application processing the variables listed in the `coordinates` attribute can recognize a labeled axis by checking whether or not a given variable contains character data.

Example 6.1. Several parcel trajectories

Consider a set of ocean floats that follow parcel trajectories and simultaneously measure temperature at fixed times. We wish to identify the floats by name. The temperature data is a function of parcel (i.e., `float`) and time. The location of each sample is also a function of parcel and time, so the position information is stored in a multidimensional coordinate variable.

```
dimensions:
  parcel = 15 ; // number of trajectories
  times = 20 ;
  max_len_parcel_name = 64 ; // max length of trajectory name
variables:
  float temperature(parcel,times) ;
  temperature:coordinates = "parcel_name lat lon" ;
  float times(times) ;
  char parcel_name(parcel,max_len_parcel_name) ;
  float lon(parcel,times) ;
  float lat(parcel,times) ;
```

6.1.1. Geographic Regions

When data is representative of geographic regions which can be identified by names but which have complex boundaries that cannot practically be specified using longitude and latitude boundary coordinates, a labeled axis should be used to identify the regions. We recommend that the names be chosen from the list of [standardized region names](http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/documents/cf-standard-names/standardized-region-names)¹ whenever possible. To indicate that the label values are standardized the variable that contains the labels must be given the `standard_name` attribute with the value `region`.

Example 6.2. Northward heat transport in Atlantic Ocean

Suppose we have data representing northward heat transport across a set of zonal slices in the Atlantic Ocean. Note that the standard names to describe this quantity do not include location information. That is provided by the latitude coordinate and the labeled axis:

¹ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/documents/cf-standard-names/standardized-region-names>

```
dimensions:
  times = 20 ;
  lat = 5
  lbl = 1 ;
  strlen = 64 ;
variables:
  float n_heat_transport(time,lat,lbl);
    n_heat_transport:units="W";
    n_heat_transport:coordinates="geo_region";
    n_heat_transport:standard_name="northward_ocean_heat_transport";
  double time(time) ;
    time:long_name = "time" ;
    time:units = "days since 1990-1-1 0:0:0" ;
  float lat(lat) ;
    lat:long_name = "latitude" ;
    lat:units = "degrees_north" ;
  char geo_region(lbl,strlen) ;
    geo_region:standard_name="region"
data:
  geo_region = "atlantic_ocean" ;
  lat = 10., 20., 30., 40., 50. ;
```

6.2. Alternative Coordinates

In some situations a dimension may have alternative sets of coordinates values. Since there can only be one coordinate variable for the dimension (the variable with the same name as the dimension), any alternative sets of values have to be stored in auxiliary coordinate variables. For such alternative coordinate variables, there are no mandatory attributes, but they may have any of the attributes allowed for coordinate variables.

Example 6.3. Model level numbers

Levels on a vertical axis may be described by both the physical coordinate and the ordinal model level number.

```
float xwind(sigma,lat);
  xwind:coordinates="model_level";
float sigma(sigma); // physical height coordinate
  sigma:long_name="sigma";
  sigma:positive="down";
int model_level(sigma); // model level number at each height
  model_level:long_name="model level number";
  model_level:positive="up";
```

Chapter 7. Data Representative of Cells

When gridded data does not represent the point values of a field but instead represents some characteristic of the field within cells of finite "volume," a complete description of the variable should include metadata that describes the domain or extent of each cell, and the characteristic of the field that the cell values represent. It is possible for a single data value to be the result of an operation whose domain is a disjoint set of cells. This is true for many types of climatological averages, for example, the mean January temperature for the years 1970-2000. The methods that we present below for describing cells only provides an association of a grid point with a single cell, not with a collection of cells. However, climatological statistics are of such importance that we provide special methods for describing their associated computational domains in [Section 7.4, "Climatological Statistics"](#).

7.1. Cell Boundaries

To represent cells we add the attribute `bounds` to the appropriate coordinate variable(s). The value of `bounds` is the name of the variable that contains the vertices of the cell boundaries. We refer to this type of variable as a "boundary variable." *A boundary variable will have one more dimension than its associated coordinate or auxiliary coordinate variable.* The additional dimension should be the most rapidly varying one, and its size is the maximum number of cell vertices. Since a boundary variable is considered to be part of a coordinate variable's metadata, it is not necessary to provide it with attributes such as `long_name` and `units`.

Note that the boundary variable for a set of N contiguous intervals is an array of shape $(N,2)$. Although in this case there will be a duplication of the boundary coordinates between adjacent intervals, this representation has the advantage that it is general enough to handle, without modification, non-contiguous intervals, as well as intervals on an axis using the unlimited dimension.

Applications that process cell boundary data often times need to determine whether or not adjacent cells share an edge. In order to facilitate this type of processing the following restrictions are placed on the data in boundary variables.

Bounds for 1-D coordinate variables

For a coordinate variable such as `lat(lat)` with associated boundary variable `latbnd(x,2)`, the interval endpoints must be ordered consistently with the associated coordinate, e.g., for an increasing coordinate, `lat(1) > lat(0)` implies `latbnd(i,1) >= latbnd(i,0)` for all i

If adjacent intervals are contiguous, the shared endpoint must be represented identically in each instance where it occurs in the boundary variable. For example, if the intervals that contain grid points `lat(i)` and `lat(i+1)` are contiguous, then `latbnd(i+1,0) = latbnd(i,1)`.

Bounds for 2-D coordinate variables with 4-sided cells

In the case where the horizontal grid is described by two-dimensional auxiliary coordinate variables in latitude `lat(n,m)` and longitude `lon(n,m)`, and the associated cells are four-sided, then the boundary variables are given in the form `latbnd(n,m,4)` and `lonbnd(n,m,4)`, where the trailing index runs over the four vertices of the cells. Let us call the side of cell (j,i) facing cell $(j,i-1)$ the "i-1" side, the side facing cell $(j,i+1)$ the "i+1" side, and similarly for "j-1" and "j+1". Then we can refer to the vertex formed by sides i-1 and j-1 as $(j-1,i-1)$. With this notation, the four vertices are indexed as follows: $0=(j-1,i-1)$, $1=(j-1,i+1)$, $2=(j+1,i+1)$, $3=(j+1,i-1)$.

If i-j-upward is a right-handed coordinate system (like lon-lat-upward), this ordering means the vertices will be traversed anticlockwise on the lon-lat surface seen from above. If i-j-upward is left-handed, they will be traversed clockwise on the lon-lat surface.

The bounds can be used to decide whether cells are contiguous via the following relationships. In these equations the variable `bnd` is used generically to represent either the latitude or longitude boundary variable.

```

For  $0 < j < n$  and  $0 < i < m$ ,
  If cells  $(j,i)$  and  $(j,i+1)$  are contiguous, then
     $\text{bnd}(j,i,1)=\text{bnd}(j,i+1,0)$ 
     $\text{bnd}(j,i,2)=\text{bnd}(j,i+1,3)$ 
  If cells  $(j,i)$  and  $(j+1,i)$  are contiguous, then
     $\text{bnd}(j,i,3)=\text{bnd}(j+1,i,0)$  and  $\text{bnd}(j,i,2)=\text{bnd}(j+1,i,1)$ 

```

Bounds for multi-dimensional coordinate variables with p-sided cells

In all other cases, the bounds should be dimensioned (\dots, n, p) , where (\dots, n) are the dimensions of the auxiliary coordinate variables, and p the number of vertices of the cells. The vertices must be traversed anticlockwise in the lon-lat plane as viewed from above. The starting vertex is not specified.

Example 7.1. Cells on a latitude axis

```

dimensions:
  lat = 64;
  nv = 2;    // number of vertices
variables:
  float lat(lat);
  lat:long_name = "latitude";
  lat:units = "degrees_north";
  lat:bounds = "lat_bnds";
  float lat_bnds(lat,nv);

```

The boundary variable `lat_bnds` associates a latitude gridpoint `i` with the interval whose boundaries are `lat_bnds(i,0)` and `lat_bnds(i,1)`. The gridpoint location, `lat(i)`, should be contained within this interval.

For rectangular grids, two-dimensional cells can be expressed as Cartesian products of one-dimensional cells of the type in the preceding example. However for non-rectangular grids a "rectangular" cell will in general require specifying all four vertices for each cell.

Example 7.2. Cells in a non-rectangular grid

```

dimensions:
  imax = 128;
  jmax = 64;
  nv = 4;
variables:
  float lat(jmax,imax);
  lat:long_name = "latitude";
  lat:units = "degrees_north";
  lat:bounds = "lat_bnds";
  float lon(jmax,imax);
  lon:long_name = "longitude";
  lon:units = "degrees_east";
  lon:bounds = "lon_bnds";
  float lat_bnds(jmax,imax,nv);
  float lon_bnds(jmax,imax,nv);

```


The boundary variables `lat_bnds` and `lon_bnds` associate a gridpoint (j,i) with the cell determined by the vertices $(\text{lat_bnds}(j,i,n), \text{lon_bnds}(j,i,n))$, $n=0, \dots, 3$. The gridpoint location, $(\text{lat}(j,i), \text{lon}(j,i))$, should be contained within this region.

7.2. Cell Measures

For some calculations, information is needed about the size, shape or location of the cells that cannot be deduced from the coordinates and bounds without special knowledge that a generic application cannot be expected to have. For instance, in computing the mean of several cell values, it is often appropriate to "weight" the values by area. When computing an area-mean each grid cell value is multiplied by the grid-cell area before summing, and then the sum is divided by the sum of the grid-cell areas. Area weights may also be needed to map data from one grid to another in such a way as to preserve the area mean of the field. The preservation of area-mean values while regridding may be essential, for example, when calculating surface heat fluxes in an atmospheric model with a grid that differs from the ocean model grid to which it is coupled.

In many cases the areas can be calculated from the cell bounds, but there are exceptions. Consider, for example, a spherical geodesic grid composed of contiguous, roughly hexagonal cells. The vertices of the cells can be stored in the variable identified by the `bounds` attribute, but the cell perimeter is not uniquely defined by its vertices (because the vertices could, for example, be connected by straight lines, or, on a sphere, by lines following a great circle, or, in general, in some other way). Thus, given the cell vertices alone, it is generally impossible to calculate the area of a grid cell. This is why it may be necessary to store the grid-cell areas in addition to the cell vertices.

In other cases, the grid cell-volume might be needed and might not be easily calculated from the coordinate information. In ocean models, for example, it is not uncommon to find "partial" grid cells at the bottom of the ocean. In this case, rather than (or in addition to) indicating grid cell area, it may be necessary to indicate volume.

To indicate extra information about the spatial properties of a variable's grid cells, a `cell_measures` attribute may be defined for a variable. This is a string attribute comprising a list of blank-separated pairs of words of the form "measure: name". For the moment, "area" and "volume" are the only defined measures, but others may be supported in future. The "name" is the name of the variable containing the measure values, which we refer to as a "measure variable". The dimensions of the measure variable should be the same as or a subset of the dimensions of the variable to which they are related, but their order is not restricted. In the case of area, for example, the field itself might be a function of longitude, latitude, and time, but the variable containing the area values would only include longitude and latitude dimensions (and the dimension order could be reversed, although this is not recommended). The variable must have a `units` attribute and may have other attributes such as a `standard_name`.

For rectangular longitude-latitude grids, the area of grid cells can be calculated from the bounds: the area of a cell is proportional to the product of the difference in the longitude bounds of the cell and the difference between the sine of each latitude bound of the cell. In this case supplying grid-cell areas via the `cell_measures` attribute is unnecessary because it may be assumed that applications can perform this calculation, using their own value for the radius of the Earth.

Example 7.3. Cell areas for a spherical geodesic grid

```
dimensions:
  cell = 2562 ; // number of grid cells
  time = 12 ;
  nv = 6 ; // maximum number of cell vertices
variables:
  float PS(time,cell) ;
  PS:units = "Pa" ;
  PS:coordinates = "lon lat" ;
  PS:cell_measures = "area: cell_area" ;
  float lon(cell) ;
```

```

lon:long_name = "longitude" ;
lon:units = "degrees_east" ;
lon:bounds="lon_vertices" ;
float lat(cell) ;
lat:long_name = "latitude" ;
lat:units = "degrees_north" ;
lat:bounds="lat_vertices" ;
float time(time) ;
time:long_name = "time" ;
time:units = "days since 1979-01-01 0:0:0" ;
float cell_area(cell) ;
cell_area:long_name = "area of grid cell" ;
cell_area:standard_name="area";
cell_area:units = "m2"
float lon_vertices(cell,nv) ;
float lat_vertices(cell,nv) ;

```

7.3. Cell Methods

To describe the characteristic of a field that is represented by cell values we define the `cell_methods` attribute of the variable. This is a string attribute comprising a list of blank-separated words of the form "name: method". Each "name: method" pair indicates that for the axis identified by name, the cell values representing the field have been determined or derived by the specified method. The token name can be a dimension of the variable, a scalar coordinate variable, or a valid standard name. The values of method should be selected from the list in [Appendix E, Cell Methods](#), which includes `point`, `sum`, `mean`, `maximum`, `minimum`, `mid_range`, `standard_deviation`, `variance`, `mode`, and `median`. Case is not significant in the method name. Some methods (e.g., `variance`) imply a change of units of the variable, and this also is specified by [Appendix D, Dimensionless Vertical Coordinates](#). It must be remembered that the method applies only to the axis indicated, and different methods may apply to other axes. If a precipitation value in a longitude-latitude cell is given the method `maximum` for these axes, for instance, it means that it is the maximum within these spatial cells, and does not imply that it is also the maximum in time.

The default interpretation for variables that have cells associated with their grid points, but do not have the `cell_methods` attribute specified, depends on whether the quantity is extensive (which depends on the size of the cell) or intensive (which doesn't). So, for example, suppose the quantities "accumulated precipitation" and "precipitation rate" each have a time axis and that time intervals are associated with each point on the time axis via a boundary variable. A variable representing accumulated precipitation is extensive in time and requires a time interval to be completely specified. Hence its default interpretation should be that the cell associated with the grid point represents the time interval over which the precipitation was accumulated. This is indicated explicitly by setting the cell method to `sum`. A precipitation rate on the other hand is intensive in time and could equally well represent an instantaneous value or a mean value over the time interval specified by the cell. However, if the mean method is not specified then the default interpretation for the quantity would be instantaneous. The default method is indicated explicitly by setting the cell method to `point`.

Example 7.4. Methods applied to a timeseries

Consider 12-hourly timeseries of pressure, temperature and precipitation from a number of stations, where pressure is measured instantaneously, maximum temperature for the preceding 12 hours is recorded, and precipitation is accumulated in a rain gauge. For a period of 48 hours from 6 a.m. on 19 April 1998, the data is structured as follows:

```

dimensions:
  time = UNLIMITED; // (5 currently)
  station = 10;

```

```

nv = 2;
variables:
  float pressure(station,time);
    pressure:long_name = "pressure";
    pressure:units = "kPa";
  float maxtemp(station,time);
    maxtemp:long_name = "temperature";
    maxtemp:units = "K";
    maxtemp:cell_methods = "time: maximum";
  float ppn(station,time);
    ppn:long_name = "depth of water-equivalent precipitation";
    ppn:units = "mm";
  double time(time);
    time:long_name = "time";
    time:units = "h since 1998-4-19 6:0:0";
    time:bounds = "time_bnds";
  double time_bnds(time,nv);
data:
  time = 0., 12., 24., 36., 48.;
  time_bnds = -12.,0., 0.,12., 12.,24., 24.,36., 36.,48.;

```

Note that in this example the time axis values coincide with the end of each interval. It is sometimes desirable, however, to use the midpoint of intervals as coordinate values for variables that are representative of an interval. An application may simply obtain the midpoint values by making use of the boundary data in `time_bnds`.

If more than one cell method is to be indicated, they should be arranged in the order they were applied. The left-most operation is assumed to have been applied first. Suppose a quantity varies in both longitude and time (dimensions `lon` and `time`) within each gridbox. Values that represent the time-average of the zonal maximum are labelled `cell_methods="lon: maximum time: mean"`, i.e. find the largest value at each instant of time over all longitudes, then average these maxima over time; values of the zonal maximum of time-averages are labelled `cell_methods="time: mean lon: maximum"`. If the methods could have been applied in any order without affecting the outcome, they may be put in any order in the `cell_methods` attribute.

If a data value is representative of variation over a combination of axes, a single method should be prefixed by the names of all the dimensions involved, whose order is immaterial. Dimensions should be grouped in this way only if there is an essential difference from treating them individually. For instance, the standard deviation of topographic height within a longitude-latitude gridbox would have `cell_methods="lat: lon: standard_deviation"`. This is not the same as `cell_methods="lon: standard_deviation lat: standard_deviation"`, which would mean finding the standard deviation along each parallel of latitude within the zonal extent of the gridbox, and then the standard deviation of these values over latitude.

To indicate more precisely how the cell method was applied, extra information may be included in parentheses () after the identification of the method. This information includes standardized and non-standardized parts. Currently the only standardized information is to provide the typical interval between the original data values to which the method was applied, in the situation where the present data values are statistically representative of original data values which had a finer spacing. The syntax is (`interval: value unit`), where *value* is a numerical value and *unit* is a string that can be recognized by UNIDATA's Udunits package [UDUNITS]. The *unit* does not have to be dimensionally equivalent to the unit of the corresponding dimension name, although it often will be. Recording the original interval is particularly important for standard deviations. For example, the standard deviation of daily values could be indicated by `cell_methods="time: standard_deviation (interval: 1 day)"` and of annual values `cell_methods="time: standard_deviation (interval: 1 year)"`.

If the cell method applies to a combination of axes, they may have a common original interval e.g. `cell_methods="lat: lon: standard_deviation (interval: 10 km)"`. Alternatively, they may

have separate intervals, which are matched to the names of axes by position e.g. `cell_methods="lat: lon: standard_deviation (interval: 0.1 degree_N interval: 0.2 degree_E)"`, in which 0.1 degree applies to latitude and 0.2 degree to longitude.

If there is both standardized and non-standardized information, the non-standardized follows the standardized information and the keyword `comment:`. For instance, an area-weighted mean over latitude could be indicated as `lat: mean (area-weighted)` or `lat: mean (interval: 1 degree_north comment: area-weighted)`.

A dimension of size one may be the result of "collapsing" an axis by some statistical operation, for instance by calculating a variance from time series data. We strongly recommend that dimensions of size one be retained and used to document the method and its domain.

Example 7.5. Surface air temperature variance

The variance of the diurnal cycle on 1 January 1990 has been calculated from hourly instantaneous surface air temperature measurements. The time dimension of size one has been retained.

```

dimensions:
  lat=90;
  lon=180;
  time=1;
  nv=2;
variables:
  float TS_var(time,lat,lon);
    TS_var:long_name="surface air temperature variance"
    TS_var:units="K2";
    TS_var:cell_methods="time: variance (of hourly instantaneous)";
  float time(time);
    time:units="days since 1990-01-01 00:00:00";
    time:bounds="time_bnds";
  float time_bnds(time,nv);
data:
  time=.5;
  time_bnds=0.,1.;

```

Notice that a parenthesized comment in the `cell_methods` attribute provides the nature of the samples used to calculate the variance.

The convention of specifying a cell method for a `standard_name` rather than for a dimension with a coordinate variable is to allow one to provide an indication that a particular cell method is relevant to the data without having to provide a precise description of the corresponding cell. There are two reasons for doing this.

- If the cell coordinate range cannot be precisely defined. For example, the Levitus ocean climatology uses any data that exists. It is a time mean but the time range is not well defined, so cannot be stated.
- For convenience, if the cell extends over all valid coordinates. This is permitted only for the standard names `longitude` and `latitude`. Methods specified for these standard names are assumed to apply to the complete range of longitude and latitude respectively. If in addition the data variable has a dimension with a corresponding labeled axis that specifies a geographic region [Section 6.1.1, “Geographic Regions”](#), the implied range of longitude and latitude is the valid range for each specified region.

We recommend that whenever possible cell bounds should be supplied by giving the variable a dimension of size one and attaching bounds to the associated coordinate variable.

7.4. Climatological Statistics

Climatological statistics may be derived from corresponding portions of the annual cycle in a set of years, e.g., the average January temperatures in the climatology of 1961-1990, where the values are derived by averaging the 30 Januarys from the separate years. Portions of the climatological cycle are specified by references to dates within the calendar year. However, a calendar year is not a well-defined unit of time, because it differs between leap years and other years, and among calendars. Nonetheless for practical purposes we wish to compare statistics for months or seasons from different calendars, and to make climatologies from a mixture of leap years and other years. Hence we provide special conventions for indicating dates within the climatological year. Climatological statistics may also be derived from corresponding portions of a range of days, for instance the average temperature for each hour of the average day in April 1997. In addition the two concepts may be used at once, for instance to indicate not April 1997, but the average April of the five years 1995-1999.

Climatological variables have a climatological time axis. Like an ordinary time axis, a climatological time axis may have a dimension of unity (for example, a variable containing the January average temperatures for 1961-1990), but often it will have several elements (for example, a climatological time axis with a dimension of 12 for the climatological average temperatures in each month for 1961-1990, a dimension of 3 for the January mean temperatures for the three decades 1961-1970, 1971-1980, 1981-1990, or a dimension of 24 for the hours of an average day). Intervals of climatological time are conceptually different from ordinary time intervals; a given interval of climatological time represents a set of subintervals which are not necessarily contiguous. To indicate this difference, a climatological time coordinate variable does not have a `bounds` attribute. Instead, it has a `climatology` attribute, which names a variable with dimensions (n,2), n being the dimension of the climatological time axis. Using the units and calendar of the time coordinate variable, element (i,0) of the climatology variable specifies the beginning of the first subinterval and element (i,1) the end of the last subinterval used to evaluate the climatological statistics with index i in the time dimension. The time coordinates should be values that are representative of the climatological time intervals, such that an application which does not recognise climatological time will nonetheless be able to make a reasonable interpretation.

The COARDS standard offers limited support for climatological time. For compatibility with COARDS, time coordinates should also be recognised as climatological if they have a `units` attribute of time-units relative to midnight on 1 January in year 0 i.e. `since 0-1-1` in `udunits` syntax, and provided they refer to the real-world calendar. We do not recommend this convention because (a) it does not provide any information about the intervals used to compute the climatology, and (b) there is no standard for how dates since year 1 will be encoded with units having a reference time in year 0, since this year does not exist; consequently there may be inconsistencies among software packages in the interpretation of the time coordinates. Year 0 may be a valid year in non-real-world calendars, and therefore cannot be used to signal climatological time in such cases.

A climatological axis may use different statistical methods to represent variation among years, within years and within days. For example, the average January temperature in a climatology is obtained by averaging both within years and over years. This is different from the average January-maximum temperature and the maximum January-average temperature. For the former, we first calculate the maximum temperature in each January, then average these maxima; for the latter, we first calculate the average temperature in each January, then find the largest one. As usual, the statistical operations are recorded in the `cell_methods` attribute, which may have two or three entries for the climatological time dimension.

Valid values of the `cell_methods` attribute must be in one of the forms from the following list. The intervals over which various statistical methods are applied are determined by decomposing the date and time specifications of the climatological time bounds of a cell, as recorded in the variable named by the `climatology` attribute. (The date and time specifications must be calculated from the time coordinates expressed in units of "time interval since reference date and time".) In the descriptions that follow we use the abbreviations *y*, *m*, *d*, *H*, *M*, and *S* for year, month, day, hour, minute, and second respectively. The suffix *0* indicates the earlier bound and *1* the latter.

```
time: method1 within years time: method2 over years
  method1 is applied to the time intervals (mdHMS0-mdHMS1) within individual years and method2 is applied
  over the range of years (y0-y1).
```

time: method1 within days time: method2 over days
method1 is applied to the time intervals (HMS0-HMS1) within individual days and *method2* is applied over the days in the interval (ymd0-ymd1).

time: method1 within days time: method2 over days time: method3 over years
method1 is applied to the time intervals (HMS0-HMS1) within individual days and *method2* is applied over the days in the interval (md0-md1), and *method3* is applied over the range of years (y0-y1).

The methods which can be specified are those listed in [Appendix E, Cell Methods](#) and each entry in the `cell_methods` attribute may also, as usual, contain non-standardised information in parentheses after the method. For instance, a mean over ENSO years might be indicated by "time: mean over years (ENSO years)".

When considering intervals within years, if the earlier climatological time bound is later in the year than the later climatological time bound, it implies that the time intervals for the individual years run from each year across January 1 into the next year e.g. DJF intervals run from December 1 0:00 to March 1 0:00. Analogous situations arise for daily intervals running across midnight from one day to the next.

When considering intervals within days, if the earlier time of day is equal to the later time of day, then the method is applied to a full 24 hour day.

We have tried to make the examples in this section easier to understand by translating all time coordinate values to date and time formats. This is not currently valid CDL syntax.

Example 7.6. Climatological seasons

This example shows the metadata for the average seasonal-minimum temperature for the four standard climatological seasons MAM JJA SON DJF, made from data for March 1960 to February 1991.

```
dimensions:
  time=4;
  nv=2;
variables:
  float temperature(time,lat,lon);
    temperature:long_name="surface air temperature";
    temperature:cell_methods="time: minimum within years time: mean over years";
    temperature:units="K";
  double time(time);
    time:climatology="climatology_bounds";
    time:units="days since 1960-1-1";
  double climatology_bounds(time,nv);
data: // time coordinates translated to date/time format
  time="1960-4-16", "1960-7-16", "1960-10-16", "1961-1-16" ;
  climatology_bounds="1960-3-1", "1990-6-1",
                    "1960-6-1", "1990-9-1",
                    "1960-9-1", "1990-12-1",
                    "1960-12-1", "1991-3-1" ;
```

Example 7.7. Decadal averages for January

Average January precipitation totals are given for each of the decades 1961-1970, 1971-1980, 1981-1990.

```
dimensions:
```

```

time=3;
nv=2;
variables:
  float precipitation(time,lat,lon);
    precipitation:long_name="precipitation amount";
    precipitation:cell_methods="time: sum within years time: mean over years";
    precipitation:units="kg m-2";
  double time(time);
    time:climatology="climatology_bounds";
    time:units="days since 1901-1-1";
  double climatology_bounds(time,nv);
data: // time coordinates translated to date/time format
time="1965-1-15", "1975-1-15", "1985-1-15" ;
climatology_bounds="1961-1-1", "1970-2-1",
                  "1971-1-1", "1980-2-1",
                  "1981-1-1", "1990-2-1" ;

```

Example 7.8. Temperature for each hour of the average day

Hourly average temperatures are given for April 1997.

```

dimensions:
  time=24;
  nv=2;
variables:
  float temperature(time,lat,lon);
    temperature:long_name="surface air temperature";
    temperature:cell_methods="time: mean within days time: mean over days";
    temperature:units="K";
  double time(time);
    time:climatology="climatology_bounds";
    time:units="hours since 1997-4-1";
  double climatology_bounds(time,nv);
data: // time coordinates translated to date/time format
time="1997-4-1 0:30", "1997-4-1 1:30", ... "1997-4-1 23:30" ;
climatology_bounds="1997-4-1 0:00", "1997-4-30 1:00",
                  "1997-4-1 1:00", "1997-4-30 2:00",
                  ...
                  "1997-4-1 23:00", "1997-5-1 0:00" ;

```

Example 7.9. Temperature for each hour of the typical climatological day

This is a modified version of the previous example. It now applies to April from a 1961-1990 climatology.

```

variables:
  float temperature(time,lat,lon);
    temperature:long_name="surface air temperature";
    temperature:cell_methods="time: mean within days ",

```

```

    "time: mean over days time: mean over years";
    temperature:units="K";
double time(time);
    time:climatology="climatology_bounds";
    time:units="days since 1961-1-1";
double climatology_bounds(time,nv);
data: // time coordinates translated to date/time format
    time="1961-4-1 0:30", "1961-4-1 1:30", ..., "1961-4-1 23:30" ;
    climatology_bounds="1961-4-1 0:00", "1990-4-30 1:00",
        "1961-4-1 1:00", "1990-4-30 2:00",
        ...
        "1961-4-1 23:00", "1990-5-1 0:00" ;

```

Example 7.10. Monthly-maximum daily precipitation totals

Maximum of daily precipitation amounts for each of the three months June, July and August 2000 are given. The first daily total applies to 6 a.m. on 1 June to 6 a.m. on 2 June, the 30th from 6 a.m. on 30 June to 6 a.m. on 1 July. The maximum of these 30 values is stored under time index 0 in the precipitation array.

```

dimensions:
    time=3;
    nv=2;
variables:
    float precipitation(time,lat,lon);
        precipitation:long_name="Accumulated precipitation";
        precipitation:cell_methods="time: sum within days time: maximum over days";
        precipitation:units="kg";
    double time(time);
        time:climatology="climatology_bounds";
        time:units="days since 2000-6-1";
    double climatology_bounds(time,nv);
data: // time coordinates translated to date/time format
    time="2000-6-16", "2000-7-16", "2000-8-16" ;
    climatology_bounds="2000-6-1 6:00:00", "2000-7-1 6:00:00",
        "2000-7-1 6:00:00", "2000-8-1 6:00:00",
        "2000-8-1 6:00:00", "2000-9-1 6:00:00" ;

```

Chapter 8. Reduction of Dataset Size

There are two methods for reducing dataset size: packing and compression. By packing we mean altering the data in a way that reduces its precision. By compression we mean techniques that store the data more efficiently and result in no precision loss. Compression only works in certain circumstances, e.g., when a variable contains a significant amount of missing or repeated data values. In this case it is possible to make use of standard utilities, e.g., UNIX `compress` or GNU `gzip`, to compress the entire file after it has been written. In this section we offer an alternative compression method that is applied on a variable by variable basis. This has the advantage that only one variable need be uncompressed at a given time. The disadvantage is that generic utilities that don't recognize the CF conventions will not be able to operate on compressed variables.

8.1. Packed Data

At the current time the netCDF interface does not provide for packing data. However a simple packing may be achieved through the use of the optional NUG defined attributes `scale_factor` and `add_offset`. After the data values of a variable have been read, they are to be multiplied by the `scale_factor`, and have `add_offset` added to them. If both attributes are present, the data are scaled before the offset is added. When scaled data are written, the application should first subtract the offset and then divide by the scale factor. The units of a variable should be representative of the unpacked data.

This standard is more restrictive than the NUG with respect to the use of the `scale_factor` and `add_offset` attributes; ambiguities and precision problems related to data type conversions are resolved by these restrictions. If the `scale_factor` and `add_offset` attributes are of the same data type as the associated variable, the unpacked data is assumed to be of the same data type as the packed data. However, if the `scale_factor` and `add_offset` attributes are of a different data type from the variable (containing the packed data) then the unpacked data should match the type of these attributes, which must both be of type `float` or both be of type `double`. An additional restriction in this case is that the variable containing the packed data must be of type `byte`, `short` or `int`. It is not advised to unpack an `int` into a `float` as there is a potential precision loss.

When data to be packed contains missing values the attributes that indicate missing values (`_FillValue`, `valid_min`, `valid_max`, `valid_range`) must be of the same data type as the packed data. See [Section 2.5.1, "Missing Data"](#) for a discussion of how applications should treat variables that have attributes indicating both missing values and transformations defined by a scale and/or offset.

8.2. Compression by Gathering

To save space in the netCDF file, it may be desirable to eliminate points from data arrays that are invariably missing. Such a compression can operate over one or more adjacent axes, and is accomplished with reference to a list of the points to be stored. The list is constructed by considering a mask array that only includes the axes to be compressed, and then mapping this array onto one dimension without reordering. The list is the set of indices in this one-dimensional mask of the required points. In the compressed array, the axes to be compressed are all replaced by a single axis, whose dimension is the number of wanted points. The wanted points appear along this dimension in the same order they appear in the uncompressed array, with the unwanted points skipped over. Compression and uncompression are executed by looping over the list.

The list is stored as the coordinate variable for the compressed axis of the data array. Thus, the list variable and its dimension have the same name. The list variable has a string attribute `compress`, containing a blank-separated list of the dimensions which were affected by the compression in the order of the CDL declaration of the uncompressed array. The presence of this attribute identifies the list variable as such. The list, the original dimensions and coordinate variables (including boundary variables), and the compressed variables with all the attributes of the uncompressed variables are written to the netCDF file. The uncompressed variables can be reconstituted exactly as they were using this information.

Example 8.1. Horizontal compression of a three-dimensional array

We eliminate sea points at all depths in a longitude-latitude-depth array of soil temperatures. In this case, only the longitude and latitude axes would be affected by the compression. We construct a list `landpoint(landpoint)` containing the indices of land points.

```
dimensions:
  lat=73;
  lon=96;
  landpoint=2381;
  depth=4;
variables:
  int landpoint(landpoint);
  landpoint:compress="lat lon";
  float landsoilt(depth,landpoint);
  landsoilt:long_name="soil temperature";
  landsoilt:units="K";
  float depth(depth);
  float lat(lat);
  float lon(lon);
data:
  landpoint=363, 364, 365, ...;
```

Since `landpoint(0)=363`, for instance, we know that `landsoilt(*,0)` maps on to point 363 of the original data with dimensions `(lat,lon)`. This corresponds to indices `(3,75)`, i.e., $363 = 3 \cdot 96 + 75$.

Example 8.2. Compression of a three-dimensional field

We compress a longitude-latitude-depth field of ocean salinity by eliminating points below the sea-floor. In this case, all three dimensions are affected by the compression, since there are successively fewer active ocean points at increasing depths.

```
variables:
  float salinity(time,oceanpoint);
  int oceanpoint(oceanpoint);
  oceanpoint:compress="depth lat lon";
  float depth(depth);
  float lat(lat);
  float lon(lon);
  double time(time);
```

This information implies that the salinity field should be uncompressed to an array with dimensions `(depth,lat,lon)`.

Appendix A. Attributes

All CF attributes are listed here except for those that are used to describe grid mappings. See Appendix F for the grid mapping attributes.

The "Type" values are **S** for string, **N** for numeric, and **D** for the type of the data variable. The "Use" values are **G** for global, **C** for variables containing coordinate data, and **D** for variables containing non-coordinate data. "Links" indicates the location of the attribute's original definition (first link) and sections where the attribute is discussed in this document (additional links as necessary).

Table A.1. Attributes

| Attribute | Type | Use | Links | Description |
|---------------------|------|------|--|---|
| add_offset | N | D | NUG (8.1)¹, Section 8.1, "Packed Data" | If present for a variable, this number is to be added to the data after it is read by an application. If both <code>scale_factor</code> and <code>add_offset</code> attributes are present, the data are first scaled before the offset is added. |
| ancillary_variables | S | D | Section 3.4, "Ancillary Data" | Identifies a variable that contains closely associated data, e.g., the measurement uncertainties of instrument data. |
| axis | S | C | Chapter 4, "Coordinate Types" | Identifies latitude, longitude, vertical, or time axes. |
| bounds | S | C | Section 7.1, "Cell Boundaries" | Identifies a boundary variable. |
| calendar | S | C | Section 4.4.1, "Calendar" | Calendar used for encoding time axes. |
| cell_measures | S | D | Section 7.2, "Cell Measures" | Identifies variables that contain cell areas or volumes. |
| cell_methods | S | D | Section 7.3, "Cell Methods" , Section 7.4, "Climatological Statistics" | Records the method used to derive data that represents cell values. |
| climatology | S | C | Section 7.4, "Climatological Statistics" | Identifies a climatology variable. |
| comment | S | G, D | Section 2.6.2, "Description of file contents" | Miscellaneous information about the data or methods used to produce it. |
| compress | S | C | Section 8.2, "Compression by Gathering" , Section 5.3, | Records dimensions which have been compressed by gathering. |

¹ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

Attributes

| Attribute | Type | Use | Links | Description |
|---------------|------|------|---|--|
| | | | “Reduced Horizontal Grid” | |
| Conventions | S | G | NUG (8.1)² | Name of the conventions followed by the dataset. |
| coordinates | S | D | Chapter 5, <i>Coordinate Systems</i>, Section 6.1, “Labels”, Section 6.2, “Alternative Coordinates” | Identifies auxiliary coordinate variables, label variables, and alternate coordinate variables. |
| _FillValue | D | D | NUG (8.1)³ | A value used to represent missing or undefined data. |
| flag_masks | D | D | Section 3.5, “Flags” | Provides a list of bit fields expressing Boolean or enumerated flags. |
| flag_meanings | S | D | Section 3.5, “Flags” | Use in conjunction with <code>flag_values</code> to provide descriptive words or phrases for each flag value. If multi-word phrases are used to describe the flag values, then the words within a phrase should be connected with underscores. |
| flag_values | D | D | Section 3.5, “Flags” | Provides a list of the flag values. Use in conjunction with <code>flag_meanings</code> . |
| formula_terms | S | C | Section 4.3.2, “Dimensionless Vertical Coordinate” | Identifies variables that correspond to the terms in a formula. |
| grid_mapping | S | D | Section 5.6, “Grid Mappings and ProjectionsHorizontal Coordinate Reference Systems, Grid Mappings, and Projections” | Identifies a variable that defines a grid mapping. |
| history | S | G | NUG (8.1)⁴ | List of the applications that have modified the original data. |
| institution | S | G, D | Section 2.6.2, “Description of file contents” | Where the original data was produced. |
| leap_month | N | C | Section 4.4.1, “Calendar” | Specifies which month is lengthened by a day in leap years for a user defined calendar. |

² <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

³ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

⁴ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

| Attribute | Type | Use | Links | Description |
|---------------------------|------|------|---|--|
| leap_year | N | C | Section 4.4.1, “Calendar” | Provides an example of a leap year for a user defined calendar. It is assumed that all years that differ from this year by a multiple of four are also leap years. |
| long_name | S | C, D | NUG (8.1)⁵, Section 3.2, “Long Name” | A descriptive name that indicates a variable's content. This name is not standardized. |
| missing_value | D | D | Section 2.5.1, “Missing Data” | A value used to represent missing or undefined data (deprecated by the NUG). |
| month_lengths | N | C | Section 4.4.1, “Calendar” | Specifies the length of each month in a non-leap year for a user defined calendar. |
| positive | S | C | [COARDS] | Direction of increasing vertical coordinate value. |
| references | S | G, D | Section 2.6.2, “Description of file contents” | References that describe the data or methods used to produce it. |
| scale_factor | N | D | NUG (8.1)⁶, Section 8.1, “Packed Data” | If present for a variable, the data are to be multiplied by this factor after the data are read by an application. See also the <code>add_offset</code> attribute. |
| source | S | G, D | Section 2.6.2, “Description of file contents” | Method of production of the original data. |
| standard_error_multiplier | N | D | Appendix C, <i>Standard Name Modifiers</i> | If a data variable with a <code>standard_name</code> modifier of <code>standard_error</code> has this attribute, it indicates that the values are the stated multiple of one standard error. |
| standard_name | S | C, D | Section 3.3, “Standard Name” | A standard name that references a description of a variable's content in the standard name table. |
| title | S | G | NUG (8.1)⁷ | Short description of the file contents. |
| units | S | C, D | NUG (8.1)⁸, Section 3.1, “Units” | Units of a variable's content. |
| valid_max | N | C, D | NUG (8.1)⁹ | Largest valid value of a variable. |
| valid_min | N | C, D | NUG (8.1)¹⁰ | Smallest valid value of a variable. |

⁵ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

⁶ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

⁷ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

⁸ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

⁹ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

¹⁰ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

Attributes

| Attribute | Type | Use | Links | Description |
|------------------|-------------|------------|---|--|
| valid_range | N | C, D | NUG (8.1) ¹¹ | Smallest and largest valid values of a variable. |

¹¹ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guidef/guidef-13.html#HEADING13-12>

Appendix B. Standard Name Table Format

The CF standard name table is an XML document (i.e., its format adheres to the XML 1.0 [XML] recommendation). The XML suite of protocols provides a reasonable balance between human and machine readability. It also provides extensive support for internationalization. See the W3C [W3C] home page for more information.

The document begins with a header that identifies it as an XML file:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
```

Next is the `standard_name_table` itself, which is bracketed by the tags `<standard_name_table>` and `</standard_name_table>`.

```
<standard_name_table
  xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
  xsi:noNamespaceSchemaLocation="CFStandardNameTable.xsd">
```

The content (delimited by the `<standard_name_table>` tags) consists of, in order,

```
<institution>Name of institution here ... </institution>
<contact>E-mail address of contact person ... </contact>
```

followed by a sequence of entry elements which may optionally be followed by a sequence of alias elements. The entry and alias elements take the following forms:

```
<entry id="an_id">
  Define the variable whose standard_name attribute has the value "an_id".
</entry>
<alias id="another_id">
  Provide alias for a variable whose standard_name attribute has the
  value "another_id".
</alias>
```

The value of the `id` attribute appearing in the entry and alias tags is a case sensitive string, containing no white-space, which uniquely identifies the entry relative to the table. *This is the value used for a variable's `standard_name` attribute.*

The purpose of the entry elements are to provide definitions for the id strings. Each entry element contains the following elements:

```
<entry id="an_id">
  <canonical_units>Representative units for the variable ... </canonical_units>
  <description>Description of the variable ... </description>
</entry>
```

Entry elements may optionally also contain the following elements:

```
<grib>GRIB parameter code</grib>
<amip>AMIP identifier string</amip>
```

Not all variables have equivalent AMIP or GRIB codes. ECMWF GRIB codes start with E, NCEP codes with N. Standard codes (in the range 1-127) are not prefaced. When a variable has more than one equivalent GRIB code, the alternatives are given as a blank-separated list.

The `alias` elements do not contain definitions. Rather they contain the value of the `id` attribute of an `entry` element that contains the sought after definition. The purpose of the `alias` elements are to provide a means for maintaining the table in a backwards compatible fashion. For example, if more than one `id` string was found to correspond to identical definitions, then the redundant definitions can be converted into aliases. It is not intended that the `alias` elements be used to accommodate the use of local naming conventions in the `standard_name` attribute strings. Each `alias` element contains a single element:

```
<alias id="an_id">
  <entry_id>Identifier of the defining entry ... </entry_id>
</alias>
```

Example B.1. A name table containing three entries

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<standard_name_table>
  <institution>Program for Climate Model Diagnosis and Intercomparison</institution>
  <contact>support@pcmdi.llnl.gov</contact>
  <entry id="surface_air_pressure">
    <canonical_units>Pa</canonical_units>
    <grib>E134</grib>
    <amip>ps</amip>
    <description>
      The surface called "surface" means the lower boundary of the atmosphere.
    </description>
  </entry>
</standard_name_table>
```



```
</description>
</entry>
<entry id="air_pressure_at_sea_level">
  <canonical_units>Pa</canonical_units>
  <grib>2 E151</grib>
  <amip>psl</amip>
  <description>
    Air pressure at sea level is the quantity often abbreviated
    as MSLP or PMSL. sea_level means mean sea level, which is close
    to the geoid in sea areas.
  </description>
</entry>
<alias id="mean_sea_level_pressure">
  <entry_id>air_pressure_at_sea_level</entry_id>
</alias>
</standard_name_table>
```

The definition of a variable with the `standard_name` attribute `surface_air_pressure` is found directly since the element with `id="surface_air_pressure"` is an entry element which contains the definition.

The definition of a variable with the `standard_name` attribute `mean_sea_level_pressure` is found indirectly by first finding the element with the `id="mean_sea_level_pressure"`, and then, since this is an alias element, by searching for the element with `id="air_pressure_at_sea_level"` as indicated by the value of the `entry_id` tag.

It is possible that new tags may be added in the future. Any applications that parse the standard table should be written so that unrecognized tags are gracefully ignored.

Appendix C. Standard Name Modifiers

In the *Units* column, *u* indicates units dimensionally equivalent to those for the unmodified standard name.

Table C.1. Standard Name Modifiers

| Modifier | Units | Description |
|------------------------|----------|---|
| detection_minimum | <i>u</i> | The smallest data value which is regarded as a detectable signal. |
| number_of_observations | 1 | The number of discrete observations or measurements from which a data value has been derived. |
| standard_error | <i>u</i> | The uncertainty of the data value. The standard error includes both systematic and statistical uncertainty. By default it is assumed that the values supplied are for one standard error. If the values supplied are for some multiple of the standard error, the <code>standard_error</code> ancillary variable should have an attribute <code>standard_error_multiplier</code> stating the multiplication factor. |
| status_flag | | Flag values indicating the quality or other status of the data values. The variable should have <code>flag_values</code> or <code>flag_masks</code> (or both) and <code>flag_meanings</code> attributes to show how it should be interpreted (Section 3.5, “Flags”). |

Appendix D. Dimensionless Vertical Coordinates

The definitions given here allow an application to compute dimensional coordinate values from the dimensionless ones and associated variables. The formulas are expressed for a gridpoint (n, k, j, i) where i and j are the horizontal indices, k is the vertical index and n is the time index. A coordinate variable is associated with its definition by the value of the `standard_name` attribute. The terms in the definition are associated with file variables by the `formula_terms` attribute. The `formula_terms` attribute takes a string value, the string being comprised of blank-separated elements of the form "term: variable", where `term` is a keyword that represents one of the terms in the definition, and `variable` is the name of the variable in a netCDF file that contains the values for that term. The order of elements is not significant.

The gridpoint indices are not formally part of the definitions, but are included to illustrate the indices that *might* be present in the file variables. For example, a vertical coordinate whose definition contains a time index is not necessarily time dependent in all netCDF files. Also, the definitions are given in general forms that may be simplified by omitting certain terms. A term that is omitted from the `formula_terms` attribute should be assumed to be zero.

Atmosphere natural log pressure coordinate

```
standard_name = "atmosphere_ln_pressure_coordinate"
```

Definition:

$$p(k) = p_0 * \exp(-lev(k))$$

where $p(k)$ is the pressure at gridpoint (k) , p_0 is a reference pressure, $lev(k)$ is the dimensionless coordinate at vertical gridpoint (k) .

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "p0: var1 lev: var2"
```

Atmosphere sigma coordinate

```
standard_name = "atmosphere_sigma_coordinate"
```

Definition:

$$p(n, k, j, i) = p_{top} + \sigma(k) * (p_s(n, j, i) - p_{top})$$

where $p(n, k, j, i)$ is the pressure at gridpoint (n, k, j, i) , p_{top} is the pressure at the top of the model, $\sigma(k)$ is the dimensionless coordinate at vertical gridpoint (k) , and $p_s(n, j, i)$ is the surface pressure at horizontal gridpoint (j, i) and time (n) .

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "sigma: var1 ps: var2 ptop: var3"
```

Atmosphere hybrid sigma pressure coordinate

```
standard_name = "atmosphere_hybrid_sigma_pressure_coordinate"
```

Definition:

$$p(n,k,j,i) = a(k)*p0 + b(k)*ps(n,j,i)$$

or

$$p(n,k,j,i) = ap(k) + b(k)*ps(n,j,i)$$

where $p(n,k,j,i)$ is the pressure at gridpoint (n,k,j,i) , $a(k)$ or $ap(k)$ and $b(k)$ are components of the hybrid coordinate at level k , $p0$ is a reference pressure, and $ps(n,j,i)$ is the surface pressure at horizontal gridpoint (j,i) and time (n) . The choice of whether $a(k)$ or $ap(k)$ is used depends on model formulation; the former is a dimensionless fraction, the latter a pressure value. In both formulations, $b(k)$ is a dimensionless fraction.

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "a: var1 b: var2 ps: var3 p0: var4"
```

where a is replaced by ap if appropriate.

The hybrid sigma-pressure coordinate for level k is defined as $a(k)+b(k)$ or $ap(k)/p0+b(k)$, as appropriate.

Atmosphere hybrid height coordinate

```
standard_name = "atmosphere_hybrid_height_coordinate"
```

Definition:

$$z(n,k,j,i) = a(k) + b(k)*orog(n,j,i)$$

where $z(n,k,j,i)$ is the height above the geoid (approximately mean sea level) at gridpoint (k,j,i) and time (n) , $orog(n,j,i)$ is the height of the surface above the geoid at (j,i) and time (n) , and $a(k)$ and $b(k)$ are the coordinates which define hybrid height level k . $a(k)$ has the dimensions of height and $b(k)$ is dimensionless.

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "a: var1 b: var2 orog: var3"
```

There is no dimensionless hybrid height coordinate. The hybrid height is best approximated as $a(k)$ if a level-dependent constant is needed.

Atmosphere smooth level vertical (SLEVE) coordinate

```
standard_name = "atmosphere_sleve_coordinate"
```

Definition:

$$z(n,k,j,i) = a(k)*ztop + b1(k)*zsurf1(n,j,i) + b2(k)*zsurf2(n,j,i)$$

where $z(n,k,j,i)$ is the height above the geoid (approximately mean sea level) at gridpoint (k,j,i) and time (n) , $ztop$ is the height of the top of the model, and $a(k)$, $b1(k)$, and $b2(k)$ are the dimensionless coordinates which define hybrid level k . $zsurf1(n,j,i)$ and $zsurf2(n,j,i)$ are respectively the large and small parts of the topography. See Shaer et al [[SCH02](#)] for details.

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "a: var1 b1: var2 b2: var3 ztop: var4 zsurf1: var5  
                zsurf2: var6"
```

The hybrid height coordinate for level k is defined as $a(k)*ztop$.

Ocean sigma coordinate

```
standard_name = "ocean_sigma_coordinate"
```

Definition:

$$z(n,k,j,i) = eta(n,j,i) + sigma(k)*(depth(j,i)+eta(n,j,i))$$

where $z(n,k,j,i)$ is height, positive upwards, relative to ocean datum (e.g. mean sea level) at gridpoint (n,k,j,i) , $eta(n,j,i)$ is the height of the ocean surface, positive upwards, relative to ocean datum at gridpoint (n,j,i) , $sigma(k)$ is the dimensionless coordinate at vertical gridpoint (k) , and $depth(j,i)$ is the distance from ocean datum to sea floor (positive value) at horizontal gridpoint (j,i) .

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "sigma: var1 eta: var2 depth: var3"
```

Ocean s-coordinate

```
standard_name = "ocean_s_coordinate"
```

Definition:

$$z(n,k,j,i) = \text{eta}(n,j,i) * (1+s(k)) + \text{depth_c} * s(k) + (\text{depth}(j,i) - \text{depth_c}) * C(k)$$

$$C(k) = (1-b) * \sinh(a * s(k)) / \sinh(a) + b * [\tanh(a * (s(k) + 0.5)) / (2 * \tanh(0.5 * a)) - 0.5]$$

where $z(n,k,j,i)$ is height, positive upwards, relative to ocean datum (e.g. mean sea level) at gridpoint (n,k,j,i) , $\text{eta}(n,j,i)$ is the height of the ocean surface, positive upwards, relative to ocean datum at gridpoint (n,j,i) , $s(k)$ is the dimensionless coordinate at vertical gridpoint (k) , and $\text{depth}(j,i)$ is the distance from ocean datum to sea floor (positive value) at horizontal gridpoint (j,i) . The constants a , b , and depth_c control the stretching.

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "s: var1 eta: var2 depth: var3 a: var4 b: var5 depth_c: var6"
```

Ocean sigma over z coordinate

```
standard_name = "ocean_sigma_z_coordinate"
```

Definition:

```
for k <= nsigma:
    z(n,k,j,i) = eta(n,j,i) + sigma(k) * (min(depth_c, depth(j,i)) + eta(n,j,i))
for k > nsigma:
    z(n,k,j,i) = zlev(k)
```

where $z(n,k,j,i)$ is height, positive upwards, relative to ocean datum (e.g. mean sea level) at gridpoint (n,k,j,i) , $\text{eta}(n,j,i)$ is the height of the ocean surface, positive upwards, relative to ocean datum at gridpoint (n,j,i) , $\text{sigma}(k)$ is the dimensionless coordinate at vertical gridpoint (k) for $k \leq \text{nsigma}$, and $\text{depth}(j,i)$ is the distance from ocean datum to sea floor (positive value) at horizontal gridpoint (j,i) . Above depth_c there are nsigma layers.

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "sigma: var1 eta: var2 depth: var3 depth_c: var4 nsigma: var5
                zlev: var6"
```

Ocean double sigma coordinate

```
standard_name = "ocean_double_sigma_coordinate"
```

Definition:

```
for k <= k_c
    z(k,j,i)= sigma(k)*f(j,i)
for k > k_c
    z(k,j,i)= f(j,i) + (sigma(k)-1)*(depth(j,i)-f(j,i))
f(j,i)= 0.5*(z1+ z2) + 0.5*(z1-z2)* tanh(2*a/(z1-z2)*(depth(j,i)-href))
```

where $z(k, j, i)$ is height, positive upwards, relative to ocean datum (e.g. mean sea level) at gridpoint (k, j, i) , $\sigma(k)$ is the dimensionless coordinate at vertical gridpoint (k) for $k \leq k_c$, and $\text{depth}(j, i)$ is the distance from ocean datum to sea floor (positive value) at horizontal gridpoint (j, i) . $z1$, $z2$, a , and href are constants.

The format for the `formula_terms` attribute is

```
formula_terms = "sigma: var1 depth: var2 z1: var3 z2: var4 a: var5 href: var6
                k_c: var7"
```

Appendix E. Cell Methods

In the *Units* column, *u* indicates the units of the physical quantity before the method is applied.

Table E.1. Cell Methods

| cell_method | Units | Description |
|--------------------|--------------|---|
| point | <i>u</i> | The data values are representative of points in space or time (instantaneous). This is the default method for a quantity that is intensive with respect to the specified dimension. |
| sum | <i>u</i> | The data values are representative of a sum or accumulation over the cell. This is the default method for a quantity that is extensive with respect to the specified dimension. |
| maximum | <i>u</i> | Maximum |
| median | <i>u</i> | Median |
| mid_range | <i>u</i> | Average of maximum and minimum |
| minimum | <i>u</i> | Minimum |
| mean | <i>u</i> | Mean (average value) |
| mode | <i>u</i> | Mode (most common value) |
| standard_deviation | <i>u</i> | Standard deviation |
| variance | u^2 | Variance |

Appendix F. Grid Mappings

Each recognized grid mapping is described in one of the sections below. Each section contains: the valid name that is used with the `grid_mapping_name` attribute; a list of the specific attributes that may be used to assign values to the mapping's parameters; the standard names used to identify the coordinate variables that contain the mapping's independent variables; and references to the mapping's definition or other information that may help in using the mapping. Since the attributes used to set a mapping's parameters may be shared among several mappings, their definitions are contained in a table in the final section. **The attributes which describe the ellipsoid and prime meridian may be included, when applicable, with any grid mapping.**

We have used the FGDC "Content Standard for Digital Geospatial Metadata" [FGDC] as a guide in choosing the values for `grid_mapping_name` and the attribute names for the parameters describing map projections.

Albers Equal Area

```
grid_mapping_name = albers_conical_equal_area
```

Map parameters:

- `standard_parallel` - There may be 1 or 2 values.
- `longitude_of_central_meridian`
- `latitude_of_projection_origin`
- `false_easting`
- `false_northing`

Map coordinates:

The x (abscissa) and y (ordinate) rectangular coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute values `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate` respectively.

Notes:

Notes on using the PROJ.4 software package for computing the mapping may be found at http://www.remotesensing.org/geotiff/proj_list/albers_equal_area_conic.html.

Azimuthal equidistant

```
grid_mapping_name = azimuthal_equidistant
```

Map parameters:

- `longitude_of_projection_origin`
- `latitude_of_projection_origin`
- `false_easting`
- `false_northing`

Map coordinates:

The x (abscissa) and y (ordinate) rectangular coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute values `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate` respectively.

Notes:

Notes on using the PROJ.4 software package for computing the mapping may be found at http://www.remotesensing.org/geotiff/proj_list/azimuthal_equidistant.html.

Lambert azimuthal equal area

```
grid_mapping_name = lambert_azimuthal_equal_area
```

Map parameters:

- `longitude_of_projection_origin`
- `latitude_of_projection_origin`
- `false_easting`
- `false_northing`

Map coordinates:

The x (abscissa) and y (ordinate) rectangular coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute values `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate` respectively.

Notes:

Notes on using the PROJ.4 software package for computing the mapping may be found at http://www.remotesensing.org/geotiff/proj_list/lambert_azimuthal_equal_area.html.

Lambert conformal

```
grid_mapping_name = lambert_conformal_conic
```

Map parameters:

- `standard_parallel` - There may be 1 or 2 values.
- `longitude_of_central_meridian`
- `latitude_of_projection_origin`
- `false_easting`
- `false_northing`

Map coordinates:

The x (abscissa) and y (ordinate) rectangular coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute values `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate` respectively.

Notes:

Notes on using the PROJ.4 software package for computing the mapping may be found at http://www.remotesensing.org/geotiff/proj_list/lambert_conic_conformal_2sp.html.

Latitude-Longitude

```
grid_mapping_name = latitude_longitude
```

This grid mapping defines the canonical 2D geographical coordinate system based upon latitude and longitude coordinates on a spherical Earth. It is included so that the figure of the Earth can be described.

Map parameters:

None.

Map coordinates:

The rectangular coordinates are longitude and latitude identified by the usual conventions (Section 4.1, “Latitude Coordinate” and Section 4.2, “Longitude Coordinate”).

Polar stereographic

```
grid_mapping_name = polar_stereographic
```

Map parameters:

- `straight_vertical_longitude_from_pole`
- `latitude_of_projection_origin` - Either +90. or -90.
- Either `standard_parallel` or `scale_factor_at_projection_origin`
- `false_easting`
- `false_northing`

Map coordinates:

The x (abscissa) and y (ordinate) rectangular coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute values `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate` respectively.

Notes:

Notes on using the PROJ.4 software package for computing the mapping may be found at http://www.remotesensing.org/geotiff/proj_list/polar_stereographic.html.

Rotated pole

```
grid_mapping_name = rotated_latitude_longitude
```

Map parameters:

- `grid_north_pole_latitude`
- `grid_north_pole_longitude`
- `north_pole_grid_longitude` - This parameter is option (default is 0).

Map coordinates:

The rotated latitude and longitude coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute values `grid_latitude` and `grid_longitude` respectively.

Notes:

Stereographic

```
grid_mapping_name = stereographic
```

Map parameters:

- `longitude_of_projection_origin`
- `latitude_of_projection_origin`
- `scale_factor_at_projection_origin`
- `false_easting`
- `false_northing`

Map coordinates:

The x (abscissa) and y (ordinate) rectangular coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute values `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate` respectively.

Notes:

Formulas for the mapping and its inverse along with notes on using the PROJ . 4 software package for doing the calculations may be found at http://www.remotesensing.org/geotiff/proj_list/stereographic.html. See the section "Polar stereographic" for the special case when the projection origin is one of the poles.

Transverse Mercator

```
grid_mapping_name = transverse_mercator
```

Map parameters:

- `scale_factor_at_central_meridian`
- `longitude_of_central_meridian`
- `latitude_of_projection_origin`
- `false_easting`
- `false_northing`

Map coordinates:

The x (abscissa) and y (ordinate) rectangular coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute values `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate` respectively.

Notes:

Formulas for the mapping and its inverse along with notes on using the PROJ . 4 software package for doing the calculations may be found at http://www.remotesensing.org/geotiff/proj_list/transverse_mercator.html.

Vertical perspective

`grid_mapping_name = vertical_perspective`

Map parameters:

- `latitude_of_projection_origin`
- `longitude_of_projection_origin`
- `perspective_point_height`
- `false_easting`
- `false_northing`

Map coordinates:

The x (abscissa) and y (ordinate) rectangular coordinates are identified by the `standard_name` attribute value `projection_x_coordinate` and `projection_y_coordinate` respectively.

Notes:

Notes on using the PROJ.4 software packages for computing the mapping may be found at http://www.remotesensing.org/geotiff/proj_list/geos.html. These notes assume the point of perspective is directly over the equator. A more general description of vertical perspective projection is given in [Snyder], pages 169-181.

In the following table the "Type" values are **S** for string and **N** for numeric.

Table F.1. Grid Mapping Attributes

| Attribute | Type | Description |
|--------------------------------|------|---|
| <code>earth_radius</code> | N | Used to specify the radius, in metres, of the spherical figure used to approximate the shape of the Earth. This attribute should be specified for those projected coordinate reference systems in which the X-Y cartesian coordinates have been derived using a spherical Earth approximation. If the cartesian coordinates were derived using an ellipsoid, this attribute should not be defined. Example: "6371007", which is the radius of the GRS 1980 Authalic Sphere. |
| <code>false_easting</code> | N | The value added to all abscissa values in the rectangular coordinates for a map projection. This value frequently is assigned to eliminate negative numbers. Expressed in the unit of the coordinate variable identified by the standard name <code>projection_x_coordinate</code> . |
| <code>false_northing</code> | N | The value added to all ordinate values in the rectangular coordinates for a map projection. This value frequently is assigned to eliminate negative numbers. Expressed in the unit of the coordinate variable identified by the standard name <code>projection_y_coordinate</code> . |
| <code>grid_mapping_name</code> | N | The name used to identify the grid mapping. |

Grid Mappings

| Attribute | Type | Description |
|--------------------------------|------|---|
| grid_north_pole_latitude | N | True latitude (degrees_north) of the north pole of the rotated grid. |
| grid_north_pole_longitude | N | True longitude (degrees_east) of the north pole of the rotated grid. |
| inverse_flattening | N | Used to specify the inverse flattening (1/f) of the ellipsoidal figure associated with the geodetic datum and used to approximate the shape of the Earth. The flattening (f) of the ellipsoid is related to the semi-major and semi-minor axes by the formula $f = (a-b)/a$. In the case of a spherical Earth this attribute should be omitted or set to zero. Example: 298.257222101 for the GRS 1980 ellipsoid. (Note: By convention the dimensions of an ellipsoid are specified using either the semi-major and semi-minor axis lengths, or the semi-major axis length and the inverse flattening. If all three attributes are specified then the supplied values must be consistent with the aforementioned formula.) |
| latitude_of_projection_origin | N | The latitude chosen as the origin of rectangular coordinates for a map projection. Domain: $-90.0 \leq \text{latitude_of_projection_origin} \leq 90.0$ |
| longitude_of_central_meridian | N | The line of longitude at the center of a map projection generally used as the basis for constructing the projection. Domain: $-180.0 \leq \text{longitude_of_central_meridian} < 180.0$ |
| longitude_of_prime_meridian | N | Specifies the longitude, with respect to Greenwich, of the prime meridian associated with the geodetic datum. The prime meridian defines the origin from which longitude values are determined. Not to be confused with the projection origin longitude (cf. longitude_of_projection_origin, a.k.a. central meridian) which defines the longitude of the map projection origin. Domain: $-180.0 \leq \text{longitude_of_prime_meridian} < 180.0$ decimal degrees. Default = 0.0 |
| longitude_of_projection_origin | N | The longitude chosen as the origin of rectangular coordinates for a map projection. Domain: $-180.0 \leq \text{longitude_of_projection_origin} < 180.0$ |
| north_pole_grid_longitude | N | Longitude (degrees) of the true north pole in the rotated grid. |
| perspective_point_height | N | Records the height, in metres, of the map projection perspective point above the ellipsoid (or sphere). Used by perspective-type map projections, for example the Vertical Perspective Projection, which may be used to simulate the view from a Meteosat satellite. |

Grid Mappings

| Attribute | Type | Description |
|---------------------------------------|------|---|
| scale_factor_at_central_meridian | N | A multiplier for reducing a distance obtained from a map by computation or scaling to the actual distance along the central meridian. Domain: scale_factor_at_central_meridian > 0.0 |
| scale_factor_at_projection_origin | N | A multiplier for reducing a distance obtained from a map by computation or scaling to the actual distance at the projection origin. Domain: scale_factor_at_projection_origin > 0.0 |
| semi_major_axis | N | Specifies the length, in metres, of the semi-major axis of the ellipsoidal figure associated with the geodetic datum and used to approximate the shape of the Earth. Commonly denoted using the symbol a. In the case of a spherical Earth approximation this attribute defines the radius of the Earth. See also the inverse_flattening attribute. |
| semi_minor_axis | N | Specifies the length, in metres, of the semi-minor axis of the ellipsoidal figure associated with the geodetic datum and used to approximate the shape of the Earth. Commonly denoted using the symbol b. In the case of a spherical Earth approximation this attribute should be omitted (the preferred option) or else set equal to the value of the semi_major_axis attribute. See also the inverse_flattening attribute. |
| standard_parallel | N | Specifies the line, or lines, of latitude at which the developable map projection surface (plane, cone, or cylinder) touches the reference sphere or ellipsoid used to represent the Earth. Since there is zero scale distortion along a standard parallel it is also referred to as a "latitude of true scale". In the situation where a conical developable surface intersects the reference ellipsoid there are two standard parallels, in which case this attribute can be used as a vector to record both latitude values, with the additional convention that the standard parallel nearest the pole (N or S) is provided first. Line of constant latitude at which the surface of the Earth and plane or developable surface intersect. This attribute may be vector valued if two standard parallels are specified. Domain: -90.0 <= standard_parallel <= 90.0 |
| straight_vertical_longitude_from_pole | N | The longitude to be oriented straight up from the North or South Pole. Domain: -180.0 <= straight_vertical_longitude_from_pole < 180.0 |

Appendix G. Revision History

14 June 2004

1. Added the section called “Lambert azimuthal equal area”.
2. the section called “Polar stereographic”: Added `latitude_of_projection_origin` map parameter.

1 July 2004

1. Section 5.7, “Scalar Coordinate Variables”: Added note that use of scalar coordinate variables inhibits interoperability with COARDS conforming applications.
2. Example 5.11, “Multiple forecasts from a single analysis”: Added `positive` attribute to the scalar coordinate `p500` to make it unambiguous that the pressure is a vertical coordinate value.

20 September 2004

1. Section 7.3, “Cell Methods”: Changed several incorrect occurrences of the cell method `"standard deviation"` to `"standard_deviation"`.

22 October 2004

1. Added Example 5.7, “Lambert conformal projection”.

25 November 2005

1. the section called “ Atmosphere hybrid height coordinate ”: Fixed definition of atmosphere hybrid height coordinate.

21 March 2006

1. Added the section called “Azimuthal equidistant”.
2. Added the section called “ Atmosphere natural log pressure coordinate ”.

17 January 2008

1. Preface: Changed text to refer to rules of CF governance, and provisional status.
2. Chapter 4, *Coordinate Types*, Chapter 5, *Coordinate Systems* : Made changes regarding use of the axis attribute to identify horizontal coordinate variables.
3. Changed document version to 1.1.

4 May 2008

1. Section 5.6, “~~Grid Mappings and Projections~~Horizontal Coordinate Reference Systems, Grid Mappings, and Projections”, Appendix F, *Grid Mappings* : Additions and revisions to CF grid mapping attributes to support the specification of coordinate reference system properties (Trac ticket #18)¹.
2. Table 3.1, “Supported Units” : Corrected Prefix for Factor "1e-2" from "deci" to "centi". (Trac ticket #25)².
3. Changed document version to 1.2.

15 July 2008

¹ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/trac/ticket/18>

² <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/trac/ticket/25>

1. [Section 3.5, “Flags”, Appendix A, Attributes, Appendix C, Standard Name Modifiers](#) : Enhanced the Flags definition to support bit field notation using a `flag_masks` attribute. (Trac ticket #26)³.
2. Changed document version to 1.3.

9 October 2008

1. Fixed defect in [Example 4.3, “Atmosphere sigma coordinate”](#). (Trac ticket #30)⁴.
2. Fixed defect in [Chapter 5, Coordinate Systems](#) . (Trac ticket #32)⁵.

7 November 2008

1. Fixed defect in wording of [Chapter 5, Coordinate Systems](#) . (Trac ticket #35)⁶.
2. Fixed defect related to subsection headings in [Appendix D, Dimensionless Vertical Coordinates](#). (Trac ticket #36)⁷.

³ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/trac/ticket/26>

⁴ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/trac/ticket/30>

⁵ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/trac/ticket/32>

⁶ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/trac/ticket/35>

⁷ <http://cf-pcmdi.llnl.gov/trac/ticket/36>

Bibliography

References

- [COARDS] *Conventions for the standardization of NetCDF Files*¹. Sponsored by the "Cooperative Ocean/Atmosphere Research Data Service," a NOAA/university cooperative for the sharing and distribution of global atmospheric and oceanographic research data sets. May 1995.
- [FGDC] *Content Standard for Digital Geospatial Metadata*². Federal Geographic Data Committee, FGDC-STD-001-1998.
- [NetCDF] *NetCDF Software Package*³. UNIDATA Program Center of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research.
- [NUG] *NetCDF User's Guide for Fortran: An Access Interface for Self-Describing Portable Data; version 3*⁴. Russ Rew, Glenn Davis, Steve Emmerson, and Harvey Davies. June 1997.
- [OGP/EPSG] *OGP Surveying & Positioning Committee*⁵ and *EPSG Geodetic Parameter Registry*⁶.
- [SCH02] C Schaer, D Leuenberger, and O Fuhrer. 2002. "A new terrain-following vertical coordinate formulation for atmospheric prediction models". *Monthly Weather Review*. 130. 2459-2480.
- [Snyder] *Map Projections: A Working Manual*⁷. USGS Professional Paper 1395.
- [UDUNITS] *UDUNITS Software Package*⁸. UNIDATA Program Center of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research.
- [W3C] *World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)*⁹.
- [XML] *Extensible Markup Language (XML) 1.0*¹⁰. T. Bray, J. Paoli, and C.M. Sperberg-McQueen. 10 February 1998.

¹ http://ferret.wrc.noaa.gov/noaa_coop/coop_cdf_profile.html

² http://www.fgdc.gov/standards/projects/FGDC-standards-projects/metadata/base-metadata/v2_0698.pdf

³ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/netcdf/guide/>

⁵ <http://www.epsg.org>

⁶ <http://www.epsg-registry.org>

⁷ <http://pubs.er.usgs.gov/usgspubs/pp/pp1395>

⁸ <http://www.unidata.ucar.edu/packages/udunits/>

⁹ <http://www.w3.org/>

¹⁰ <http://www.w3.org/TR/1998/REC-xml-19980210>