

# **rec-mode: an Emacs mode for editing recfiles**

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for version 1.7, 17 February 2014

by Jose E. Marchesi

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This manual is for rec-mode for Emacs, which is part of the GNU recutils suite (version 1.7, 17 February 2014).

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# 1 Introduction

rec-mode is a mode for browsing and editing recfiles, which are text files containing data structured in fields and records. It is part of the GNU recutils<sup>1</sup> suite.

Recfiles are text-based databases which are easy to read and write manually using a text editor. At the same time they feature enough structure so they can be read, edited and processed automatically by programs.

## 1.1 Installation

rec-mode is implemented in a self-contained elisp file called ‘`rec-mode.el`’. It can be obtained in several ways:

- As part of a released tarball of recutils. ‘`rec-mode.el`’ can be found in the ‘`etc/`’ directory in the tarball contents.
- As part of the source tree cloned from the development git repo. ‘`rec-mode.el`’ can be found in the ‘`etc/`’ directory in the recutils sources tree.
- As a single file downloaded from some other location in internet.
- It may be already installed as part of a binary package in some distribution.

In the first three cases you need to tell Emacs where to locate the ‘`rec-mode.el`’ file and to load it. Add the following to your ‘`.emacs`’ file.

```
(add-to-list 'load-path "~/path/to/recmode/")
(require 'rec-mode)
```

If ‘`rec-mode.el`’ was installed as part of a binary package in a distribution then you usually don’t have to touch the `load-path` variable. Depending on the specific case you may have to `require` the package.

## 1.2 Activation

To make sure files with extension ‘`.rec`’ use rec-mode, add the following line to your ‘`.emacs`’ file.

```
(add-to-list 'auto-mode-alist '(("\\.rec\\$" . rec-mode))
```

rec-mode buffers need font-lock to be turned on - this is the default in Emacs<sup>2</sup>.

With this setup, all files with extension ‘`.rec`’ will be put into rec mode. As an alternative, make the first line of a recfile look like this:

```
# -*- mode: rec -*-
```

which will select rec-mode for this buffer no matter what the file’s name is.

## 1.3 Feedback

If you find problems with rec-mode, or if you have questions, remarks, or ideas about it, please mail to the recutils mailing list [bug-recutils@gnu.org](mailto:bug-recutils@gnu.org). If you are not a member of the mailing list, your mail will be passed to the list after a moderator has approved it<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gnu.org/software/recutils>

<sup>2</sup> If you don’t use font-lock globally, turn it on in the rec buffer with `(add-hook 'rec-mode-hook 'turn-on-font-lock)`

<sup>3</sup> Please consider subscribing to the mailing list, in order to minimize the work the mailing list moderators have to do. The subscription can be done online at <http://lists.gnu.org/mailman/listinfo/bug-recutils>.

## 2 Navigation mode

When a recfile is visited in Emacs and rec-mode is activated, the contents of the file are examined and parsed in order to determine if it is a valid recfile and, in that case, to extract information like the kind of records stored in the file.

If the file does not contain valid rec data then the buffer is put in `fundamental-mode` and a description of the syntax error, along its location, is notified in the echo area.

If the file contains valid rec data, the mode sets itself in what is known as “navigation mode”. In this mode the buffer is made read-only and it is narrowed to the first record present in the file. Also, the presentation of the record contents is slightly changed in order to improve the visualization of the data: continuation line marks are replaced by indentation, big fields are folded, etc. The modeline is changed in order to reflect the type of the records being navigated.

At this point the user can navigate through the records and fields contained in the file, and edit the contents of the fields and the structure of the records, by using the commands described in the following subsections.

### 2.1 Record navigation

The following commands jump to other records in the buffer.

- `n` (rec-cmd-goto-next-rec)  
Display the next record of the same type in the buffer.  
'C-u N n' will move next N times.
- `p` (rec-cmd-goto-previous-rec)  
Display the previous record of the same type in the buffer.  
'C-u N p' will move backwards N times.
- `d` (rec-cmd-show-descriptor)  
Display the record descriptor applicable to the current record. If the current record is anonymous, *i.e.* there is not record descriptor. then this command does nothing.
- `b` (rec-cmd-jump-back)  
Display the record previously displayed in the buffer.
- `C-c t` (rec-find-type)  
Prompt the user for one of the record types present in the recfile and display the first record of the selected type.

### 2.2 Field navigation

The following commands iterate through the fields in a record, and to get information about some of the properties of the fields.

- `TAB` (rec-cmd-goto-next-field)  
Move the cursor to the beginning of the name of the next field in the current record. If the cursor is currently located at the last field of the record then move it to the beginning of the first field.
- `t` (rec-cmd-show-type)  
Show information about the type of the field under the cursor, if it is defined.

## 2.3 Field folding

Fields in recfiles can contain data of any size, and sometimes it is difficult to have an overview of the contents of the record. The following commands fold and unfold the value of the field under the cursor.

*SPC* (rec-cmd-toggle-field-visibility)

Toggle the visibility of the field under the cursor. When a field is folded then three dots are displayed in the buffer instead of the value of the field.

It is possible to automatically fold any field whose value exceeds a certain limit which can be configured by the user. See [Section 4.2 \[Records appearance\]](#), page 6.

## 2.4 Field edition

The following commands change the value of the field under the cursor.

*e* (rec-cmd-edit-field)

Edit the value of the field under the cursor. The specific action depends on the type of the field in the corresponding record descriptor:

- For **date** fields a calendar buffer is opened in another window and the focus is moved there. The user can then select a date by moving the cursor there and press *RET* in order to set that date as the value for the field. Alternatively the user can press *t* in order to set the field to “now”, or *q* to cancel the operation. In the later case the value of the field is left untouched.
- For **enumerated** and **bool** fields a fast-select buffer is opened in another window, showing a list of labeled options. The labels are single digits and letters. The user can then select any of the options by pressing the corresponding label, or cancel the operation by pressing *RET*. In the later case the value of the field is left untouched.
- For any other kind of fields an edition buffer is opened in another window, showing the current contents of the field. The user can then edit the buffer as desired. When she is done, the user can then press *C-c C-c* in order to set the new value of the field, or just kill the buffer to cancel the operation.

*m* (rec-cmd-trim-field-value)

Trim the value of the field under the cursor, removing any sequence of leading and trailing blank characters.

## 2.5 Searches

The following commands jump to the first record in the buffer satisfying some criteria.

*s q* (rec-cmd-select-fast)

Display the first record having a field whose value matches a given fixed pattern. This is equivalent of using the command line option ‘-q’ of *recsel*.

*s s* (rec-cmd-select-sex)

Display the first record in the buffer satisfying a given selection expression. This is equivalent of using the command line option ‘-e’ of *recsel*.

## 2.6 Statistics

The following commands allow to count records in the current buffer based on some provided criteria.

*I* (rec-cmd-show-info)

Show the number of records in the buffer categorized by type.

**# (rec-cmd-count)**

Count the number of records in the buffer having the same type as the current record. With a numeric prefix *N*, ask for a selection expression and count the number of records in the buffer satisfying the expression.

Note that *rec-mode* tries to guess a reasonable default for the selection expression, depending on the type of the field and its value. If the user press *RET* then the provided default selection expression is used.

**% (rec-cmd-statistics)**

If the field under the cursor contains an enumerated value, show the percentages of records in the current record set having fields with each of the possible values of the enumerated type.

## 2.7 Data integrity

The integrity of the *rec* data stored in the file can be checked using the following commands.

**c (rec-cmd-compile)**

Compile the buffer with *recfix* and open a compilation window showing the result of the command. In case some error or warning is reported, the user can jump to the location triggering the error by pressing *RET* in the compilation window.

## 3 Edition modes

The navigation mode described in a previous chapter is mainly intended for browsing recdata and doing changes at the record level: editing the contents of a field, adding or removing fields, etc. In order to perform broader changes, such as adding/deleting record descriptors, records or comment blocks, the user must enter into one of the “edition modes”.

There are three edition modes, covering different areas of the recfile: record, record type and buffer. When an edition mode is entered the buffer is set in read/write mode, it is narrowed to the desired area and any embellishment used in navigation mode is removed<sup>1</sup>. As a general rule, the commands available in navigation mode are also available in the edition mode prefixed with *C-c*. Thus, *C-c n* would make the cursor to jump to the beginning of the next record.

The following commands are used to enter into one of the available edition modes from the navigation mode.

- R* (*rec-edit-record*)  
Edit the record being navigated.
- T* (*rec-edit-type*)  
Edit the record set being navigated.
- B* (*rec-edit-buffer*)  
Edit the buffer.

After doing modifications in the buffer, the user can go back to navigation mode by using the following command.

- C-c C-c* (*rec-finish-editing*)  
Finish the current edition and return to navigation mode. If a syntactic error was introduced in the edition activity then the error is reported in the echo area and navigation mode is not entered.

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptuating font-lock



## 4 Configuration

TBC

### 4.1 Finding the recutils

`rec-mode` makes use of the several utilities which are part of the recutils. The following variables tell the mode where to find the utilities. The default values of these variables must work if the recutils are installed system-wide in the system.

`rec-recsel`

Name of the `recsel` utility from the GNU recutils.

`rec-recinf`

Name of the `recinf` utility from the GNU recutils.

`rec-recfix`

Name of the `recfix` utility from the GNU recutils.

### 4.2 Records appearance

The appearance of the records in navigation mode can be customised by tweaking the value of the following variables.

`rec-max-lines-in-fields`

Values in fields having more than the specified number of lines will be hidden by default in navigation mode. When hidden, an ellipsis is shown instead of the value of the field. Default is 15.

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If your document contains nontrivial examples of program code, we recommend releasing these examples in parallel under your choice of free software license, such as the GNU General Public License, to permit their use in free software.