

How the GNU General Public License Applies to Junicode

The GPL is intended to protect conventional software programs. Though fonts are software programs, they are something of a special case, for several reasons.

First, the GPL requires that “source code” be distributed or made available whenever a program is distributed. “Source code” is “the preferred form of the work for making modifications to it.” For a TrueType font, that “preferred form” is just as likely to be the executable file, the binary font file, as anything else, since every major font editor allows the developer to open such a file, edit it, and save it again. Indeed, the binary TrueType format is more portable than the “source code” used by such programs as FontForge and FontLab. For this reason, **if you create a font based on Junicode, you are not required to distribute source code for it other than the binary, “executable” font.** In a TrueType font, it is possible to set a flag to signal that the font may not be edited. In keeping with the spirit of the GPL, **you must not set this flag.**

Second, the manner in which a font is distributed may differ from that of a conventional program. Specifically, portions of a font, rather than the whole thing, may be embedded in a PDF document. It is unclear whether the various tools that produce PDF documents embed the font’s copyright notice along with the font itself. Nevertheless, **nothing in the GPL should be construed as prohibiting the embedding of a font in a PDF document.** The font should always be marked “embeddable.” The developer of Junicode does not hold that the relationship between a font and the PDF document in which it is embedded is the same as that between a subroutine library and a program in which it is incorporated. Your using Junicode does not restrict the licensing of your PDF file. On this point the developer of Junicode speaks only for himself and not for other font developers.

Third, if you intend to edit Junicode you need to be aware that some font editors may insert program code that is incompatible with the GPL into a font. This is not true of FontForge, the program used to develop Junicode; it is certainly not true of Xgridfit, the GPL language compiler used to “hint” the font. But FontLab appears to insert a library of its own code into fonts that it “autohints” or that are hinted by its graphical hinter. The developer of Junicode has been unable to ascertain the legal status of this code, which *may* be incompatible with the GPL. **If you intend to use FontLab or another proprietary tool (such as Microsoft’s VTT) for hinting, you should first make sure that doing so will not violate the GPL.** Contact the vendor of the tool you want to use if you are in doubt. Do not direct such questions to the developer of Junicode.

GNU General Public License

Version 2, June 1991

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