

NAME

random, srand, initstate, setstate - random number generator

SYNOPSIS

```
#include <stdlib.h>

long int random(void);

void srand(unsigned int seed);

char *initstate(unsigned int seed, char *state, size_t n);
char *setstate(char *state);
```

Feature Test Macro Requirements for glibc (see [feature_test_macros\(7\)](#)):

```
random(), srand(), initstate(), setstate():
    _XOPEN_SOURCE >= 500 || /* Glibc since 2.19: */ _DEFAULT_SOURCE || /* Glibc versions <=
    2.19: */ _SVID_SOURCE || _BSD_SOURCE
```

DESCRIPTION

The **random()** function uses a nonlinear additive feedback random number generator employing a default table of size 31 long integers to return successive pseudo-random numbers in the range from 0 to **RAND_MAX**. The period of this random number generator is very large, approximately $16 * ((2^{31}) - 1)$.

The **srand()** function sets its argument as the seed for a new sequence of pseudo-random integers to be returned by **random()**. These sequences are repeatable by calling **srand()** with the same seed value. If no seed value is provided, the **random()** function is automatically seeded with a value of 1.

The **initstate()** function allows a state array *state* to be initialized for use by **random()**. The size of the state array *n* is used by **initstate()** to decide how sophisticated a random number generator it should use—the larger the state array, the better the random numbers will be. Current "optimal" values for the size of the state array *n* are 8, 32, 64, 128, and 256 bytes; other amounts will be rounded down to the nearest known amount. Using less than 8 bytes results in an error. *seed* is the seed for the initialization, which specifies a starting point for the random number sequence, and provides for restarting at the same point.

The **setstate()** function changes the state array used by the **random()** function. The state array *state* is used for random number generation until the next call to **initstate()** or **setstate()**. *state* must first have been initialized using **initstate()** or be the result of a previous call of **setstate()**.

RETURN VALUE

The **random()** function returns a value between 0 and **RAND_MAX**. The **srand()** function returns no value.

The **initstate()** function returns a pointer to the previous state array. On error, *errno* is set to indicate the cause.

On success, **setstate()** returns a pointer to the previous state array. On error, it returns NULL, with *errno* set to indicate the cause of the error.

ERRORS**EINVAL**

The *state* argument given to **setstate()** was NULL.

EINVAL

A state array of less than 8 bytes was specified to **initstate()**.

ATTRIBUTES

For an explanation of the terms used in this section, see [attributes\(7\)](#).

| Interface | Attribute | Value |
|---|---------------|---------|
| random(), srand(), initstate(), setstate() | Thread safety | MT-Safe |

CONFORMING TO

POSIX.1-2001, POSIX.1-2008, 4.3BSD.

NOTES

The **random()** function should not be used in multithreaded programs where reproducible behavior is required. Use [random_r\(3\)](#) for that purpose.

Random-number generation is a complex topic. *Numerical Recipes in C: The Art of Scientific Computing* (William H. Press, Brian P. Flannery, Saul A. Teukolsky, William T. Vetterling; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 3rd ed.) provides an excellent discussion of practical random-number generation issues in Chapter 7 (Random Numbers).

For a more theoretical discussion which also covers many practical issues in depth, see Chapter 3 (Random Numbers) in Donald E. Knuth's *The Art of Computer Programming*, volume 2 (Seminumerical Algorithms), 2nd ed.; Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1981.

BUGS

According to POSIX, **initstate()** should return NULL on error. In the glibc implementation, *errno* is (as specified) set on error, but the function does not return NULL.

SEE ALSO

[getrandom\(2\)](#), [drand48\(3\)](#), [rand\(3\)](#), [random_r\(3\)](#), [srand\(3\)](#)

COLOPHON

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