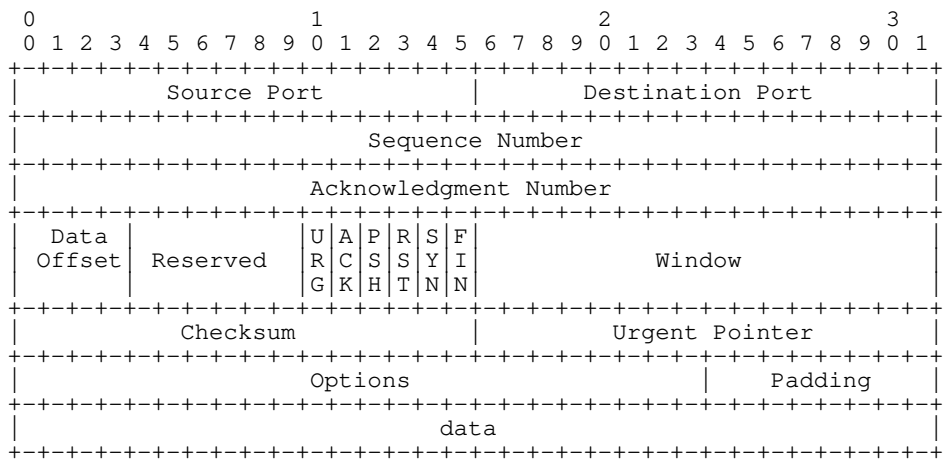
3.1. Header Format

TCP segments are sent as internet datagrams. The Internet Protocol header carries several information fields, including the source and destination host addresses [2]. A TCP header follows the internet header, supplying information specific to the TCP protocol. This division allows for the existence of host level protocols other than TCP.

TCP Header Format



TCP Header Format

Note that one tick mark represents one bit position.

Figure 3.

Source Port: 16 bits

The source port number.

Destination Port: 16 bits

The destination port number.

Sequence Number: 32 bits

The sequence number of the first data octet in this segment (except when SYN is present). If SYN is present the sequence number is the initial sequence number (ISN) and the first data octet is ISN+1.

Acknowledgment Number: 32 bits

If the ACK control bit is set this field contains the value of the next sequence number the sender of the segment is expecting to receive. Once a connection is established this is always sent.

Data Offset: 4 bits

The number of 32 bit words in the TCP Header. This indicates where the data begins. The TCP header (even one including options) is an integral number of 32 bits long.

Reserved: 6 bits

Reserved for future use. Must be zero.

Control Bits: 6 bits (from left to right):

URG: Urgent Pointer field significant
ACK: Acknowledgment field significant
PSH: Push Function
RST: Reset the connection
SYN: Synchronize sequence numbers
FIN: No more data from sender

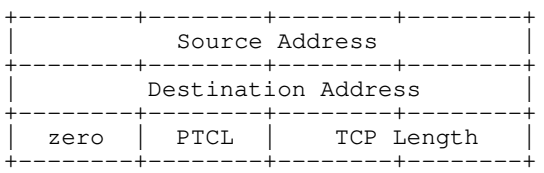
Window: 16 bits

The number of data octets beginning with the one indicated in the acknowledgment field which the sender of this segment is willing to accept.

Checksum: 16 bits

The checksum field is the 16 bit one's complement of the one's complement sum of all 16 bit words in the header and text. If a segment contains an odd number of header and text octets to be checksummed, the last octet is padded on the right with zeros to form a 16 bit word for checksum purposes. The pad is not transmitted as part of the segment. While computing the checksum, the checksum field itself is replaced with zeros.

The checksum also covers a 96 bit pseudo header conceptually prefixed to the TCP header. This pseudo header contains the Source Address, the Destination Address, the Protocol, and TCP length. This gives the TCP protection against misrouted segments. This information is carried in the Internet Protocol and is transferred across the TCP/Network interface in the arguments or results of calls by the TCP on the IP.



The TCP Length is the TCP header length plus the data length in octets (this is not an explicitly transmitted quantity, but is computed), and it does not count the 12 octets of the pseudo header.

Urgent Pointer: 16 bits

This field communicates the current value of the urgent pointer as a positive offset from the sequence number in this segment. The urgent pointer points to the sequence number of the octet following the urgent data. This field is only be interpreted in segments with the URG control bit set.

Options: variable