

**NAME**

**attr\_get, wattr\_get, attr\_set, wattr\_set, attr\_off, wattr\_off, attr\_on, wattr\_on, attroff, wattroff, attron, wattron, attrset, wattrset, chgat, wchgat, mvchgat, mvwchgat, color\_set, wcolor\_set, standend, wstandend, standout, wstandout** - manipulate attributes of character cells in *curses* windows

**SYNOPSIS**

```
#include <curses.h>
```

```
int attr_get(attr_t *attrs, short *pair, void *opts);
int wattr_get(WINDOW *win, attr_t *attrs, short *pair, void *opts);
int attr_set(attr_t attrs, short pair, void *opts);
int wattr_set(WINDOW *win, attr_t attrs, short pair, void *opts);
```

```
int attr_off(attr_t attrs, void *opts);
int wattr_off(WINDOW *win, attr_t attrs, void *opts);
int attr_on(attr_t attrs, void *opts);
int wattr_on(WINDOW *win, attr_t attrs, void *opts);
```

```
int attroff(int attrs);
int wattroff(WINDOW *win, int attrs);
int attron(int attrs);
int wattron(WINDOW *win, int attrs);
int attrset(int attrs);
int wattrset(WINDOW *win, int attrs);
```

```
int chgat(int n, attr_t attr, short pair, const void *opts);
int wchgat(WINDOW *win,
    int n, attr_t attr, short pair, const void *opts);
int mvchgat(int y, int x,
    int n, attr_t attr, short pair, const void *opts);
int mvwchgat(WINDOW *win, int y, int x,
    int n, attr_t attr, short pair, const void *opts);
```

```
int color_set(short pair, void* opts);
int wcolor_set(WINDOW *win, short pair, void* opts);
```

```
int standend(void);
int wstandend(WINDOW *win);
int standout(void);
int wstandout(WINDOW *win);
```

**DESCRIPTION**

These routines manipulate the current attributes of the named window, which then apply to all characters that are written into the window with **waddch**, **waddstr** and **wprintw**. Attributes are a property of the character, and move with the character through any scrolling and insert/delete line/character operations. To the extent possible, they are displayed as appropriate modifications to the graphic rendition of characters put on the screen.

These routines do not affect the attributes used when erasing portions of the window. See **curs\_bkgd(3X)** for functions which modify the attributes used for erasing and clearing.

**Window Attributes**

There are two sets of functions:

- ⊕ functions for manipulating the window attributes and color: **wattr\_set** and **wattr\_get**.
- ⊕ functions for manipulating only the window attributes (not color): **wattr\_on** and **wattr\_off**.

The **wattr\_set** function sets the current attributes of the given window to *attrs*, with color specified by *pair*.

Use **wattr\_get** to retrieve attributes for the given window.

Use **attr\_on** and **wattr\_on** to turn on window attributes, i.e., values OR'd together in *attr*, without affecting other attributes. Use **attr\_off** and **wattr\_off** to turn off window attributes, again values OR'd together in *attr*, without affecting other attributes.

**Legacy Window Attributes**

The X/Open window attribute routines which *set* or *get*, *turn on* or *off* are extensions of older routines which assume that color pairs are OR'd into the attribute parameter. These newer routines use similar names, because X/Open simply added an underscore (`_`) for the newer names.

The **int** datatype used in the legacy routines is treated as if it is the same size as **chtype** (used by **waddch(3X)**). It holds the common video attributes (such as bold, reverse), as well as a few bits for color. Those bits correspond to the **A\_COLOR** symbol. The **COLOR\_PAIR** macro provides a value which can be OR'd into the attribute parameter. For example, as long as that value fits into the **A\_COLOR** mask, then these calls produce similar results:

```
attrset(A_BOLD | COLOR_PAIR(pair));
attr_set(A_BOLD, pair, NULL);
```

However, if the value does not fit, then the **COLOR\_PAIR** macro uses only the bits that fit. For example, because in *ncurses* **A\_COLOR** has eight (8) bits, then **COLOR\_PAIR(259)** is 4 (i.e., 259 is 4 more than the limit 255).

The **PAIR\_NUMBER** macro extracts a pair number from an **int** (or **chtype**). For example, the *input* and *output* values in these statements would be the same:

```
int value = A_BOLD | COLOR_PAIR(input);
int output = PAIR_NUMBER(value);
```

The **attrset** routine is a legacy feature predating SVr4 curses but kept in X/Open Curses for the same reason that SVr4 curses kept it: compatibility.

The remaining **attr\*** functions operate exactly like the corresponding **attr\_\*** functions, except that they take arguments of type **int** rather than **attr\_t**.

There is no corresponding **attrget** function as such in X/Open Curses, although *ncurses* provides **getattrs** (see **curs\_legacy(3X)**).

### Change Character Rendition

The routine **chgat** changes the attributes of a given number of characters starting at the current cursor location of **stdscr**. It does not update the cursor and does not perform wrapping. A character count of -1 or greater than the remaining window width means to change attributes all the way to the end of the current line. The **wchgat** function generalizes this to any window; the **mvwchgat** function does a cursor move before acting.

In these functions, the color *pair* argument is a color pair index (as in the first argument of **init\_pair**, see **curs\_color(3X)**).

### Change Window Color

The routine **color\_set** sets the current color of the given window to the foreground/background combination described by the color *pair* parameter.

### Standout

The routine **standout** is the same as **attron(A\_STANDOUT)**. The routine **standend** is the same as **attrset(A\_NORMAL)** or **attrset(0)**, that is, it turns off all attributes.

X/Open Curses does not mark these "restricted", because

- ⊕ they have well established legacy use, and

- ⊕ there is no ambiguity about the way the attributes might be combined with a color pair.

### Video Attributes

The following video attributes, defined in `<curses.h>`, can be passed to the routines **attron**, **attroff**, and **attrset**, or OR'd with the characters passed to **addch** (see `curs_addch(3X)`).

Name	Description
<b>A_NORMAL</b>	Normal display (no highlight)
<b>A_STANDOUT</b>	Best highlighting mode of the terminal
<b>A_UNDERLINE</b>	Underlining
<b>A_REVERSE</b>	Reverse video
<b>A_BLINK</b>	Blinking
<b>A_DIM</b>	Half bright
<b>A_BOLD</b>	Extra bright or bold
<b>A_PROTECT</b>	Protected mode
<b>A_INVIS</b>	Invisible or blank mode
<b>A_ALTCHARSET</b>	Alternate character set
<b>A_ITALIC</b>	Italics (non-X/Open extension)
<b>A_CHARTEXT</b>	Bit-mask to extract a character
<b>A_COLOR</b>	Bit-mask to extract a color (legacy routines)

These video attributes are supported by **attr\_on** and related functions (which also support the attributes recognized by **attron**, etc.):

Name	Description
------	-------------

<b>WA_HORIZONTAL</b>	Horizontal highlight
<b>WA_LEFT</b>	Left highlight
<b>WA_LOW</b>	Low highlight
<b>WA_RIGHT</b>	Right highlight
<b>WA_TOP</b>	Top highlight
<b>WA_VERTICAL</b>	Vertical highlight

The return values of many of these routines are not meaningful (they are implemented as macro-expanded assignments and simply return their argument). The SVr4 manual page claims (falsely) that these routines always return **1**.

## RETURN VALUE

All routines return the integer **OK** on success, or **ERR** on failure.

X/Open Curses does not specify any error conditions.

This implementation

- ⊕ returns an error if the window pointer is null.
- ⊕ returns an error if the color pair parameter for **wcolor\_set** is outside the range 0..COLOR\_PAIRS-1.
- ⊕ does not return an error if either of the parameters of **wattr\_get** used for retrieving attribute or color pair values is **NULL**.

Functions prefixed with "mv" first perform cursor movement and fail if the position (y, x) is outside the window boundaries.

## NOTES

These functions may be macros:

**attroff**, **wattroff**, **attron**, **wattron**, **attrset**, **wattrset**, **standend** and **standout**.

Color pair values can only be OR'd with attributes if the pair number is less than 256. The alternate functions such as **color\_set** can pass a color pair value directly. However, *ncurses* ABI 4 and 5 simply OR this value within the alternate functions. You must use *ncurses* ABI 6 to support more than 256 color pairs.

## EXTENSIONS

This implementation provides the **A\_ITALIC** attribute for terminals which have the **enter\_italics\_mode** (**sitm**) and **exit\_italics\_mode** (**ritm**) capabilities. Italics are not mentioned in X/Open Curses. Unlike the other video attributes, **A\_ITALIC** is unrelated to the **set\_attributes** capabilities. This implementation makes the assumption that **exit\_attribute\_mode** may also reset italics.

Each of the functions added by XSI Curses has a parameter *opts*, which X/Open Curses still (after more than twenty years) documents as reserved for future use, saying that it should be **NULL**. This implementation uses that parameter in ABI 6 for the functions which have a color pair parameter to support *extended color pairs*:

- ⊕ For functions which modify the color, e.g., **wattr\_set** and **wattr\_on**, if *opts* is set it is treated as a pointer to **int**, and used to set the color pair instead of the **short pair** parameter.
- ⊕ For functions which retrieve the color, e.g., **wattr\_get**, if *opts* is set it is treated as a pointer to **int**, and used to retrieve the color pair as an **int** value, in addition to retrieving it via the standard pointer to **short** parameter.
- ⊕ For functions which turn attributes off, e.g., **wattr\_off**, the *opts* parameter is ignored except except to check that it is **NULL**.

## PORTABILITY

These functions are described in X/Open Curses, Issue 4. The standard defined the dedicated type for highlights, **attr\_t**, which was not defined in SVr4 curses. The functions taking **attr\_t** arguments were not supported under SVr4.

Very old versions of this library did not force an update of the screen when changing the attributes. Use **touchwin** to force the screen to match the updated attributes.

X/Open Curses states that whether the traditional functions **attron/attroff/attrset** can manipulate attributes other than **A\_BLINK**, **A\_BOLD**, **A\_DIM**, **A\_REVERSE**, **A\_STANDOUT**, or **A\_UNDERLINE** is "unspecified". Under this implementation as well as SVr4 curses, these functions correctly manipulate all other highlights (specifically, **A\_ALTCHARSET**, **A\_PROTECT**, and **A\_INVIS**).

X/Open Curses added these entry points:

**attr\_get, attr\_on, attr\_off, attr\_set, wattr\_on, wattr\_off, wattr\_get, wattr\_set**

The new functions are intended to work with a new series of highlight macros prefixed with **WA\_**. The older macros have direct counterparts in the newer set of names:

Name	Description
<b>WA_NORMAL</b>	Normal display (no highlight)
<b>WA_STANDOUT</b>	Best highlighting mode of the terminal
<b>WA_UNDERLINE</b>	Underlining
<b>WA_REVERSE</b>	Reverse video
<b>WA_BLINK</b>	Blinking
<b>WA_DIM</b>	Half bright
<b>WA_BOLD</b>	Extra bright or bold
<b>WA_ALTCHARSET</b>	Alternate character set

X/Open Curses does not assign values to these symbols, nor does it state whether or not they are related to the similarly-named **A\_NORMAL**, etc.:

- ⊕ X/Open Curses specifies that each pair of corresponding **A\_** and **WA\_**-using functions operates on the same current-highlight information.
- ⊕ However, in some implementations, those symbols have unrelated values.

For example, the Solaris *xpg4* (X/Open) curses declares **attr\_t** to be an unsigned short integer (16-bits), while **chtype** is a unsigned integer (32-bits). The **WA\_** symbols in this case are different from the **A\_** symbols because they are used for a smaller datatype which does not represent **A\_CHARTEXT** or **A\_COLOR**.

In this implementation (as in many others), the values happen to be the same because it simplifies copying information between **chtype** and **cchar\_t** variables.

- ⊕ Because *ncurses*'s **attr\_t** can hold a color pair (in the **A\_COLOR** field), a call to **wattr\_on**, **wattr\_off**, or **wattr\_set** may alter the window's color. If the color pair information in the attribute parameter is zero, no change is made to the window's color.

This is consistent with SVr4 curses; X/Open Curses does not specify this.

The X/Open Curses extended conformance level adds new highlights **A\_HORIZONTAL**, **A\_LEFT**, **A\_LOW**, **A\_RIGHT**, **A\_TOP**, **A\_VERTICAL** (and corresponding **WA\_** macros for each). As of August 2013, no known terminal provides these highlights (i.e., via the **sgr1** capability).

## HISTORY

X/Open Curses is largely based on SVr4 curses, adding support for "wide-characters" (not specific to Unicode). Some of the X/Open differences from SVr4 curses address the way video attributes can be applied to wide-characters. But aside from that, **attrset** and **attr\_set** are similar. SVr4 curses provided the basic features for manipulating video attributes. However, earlier versions of curses provided a part of these features.

As seen in 2.8BSD, curses assumed 7-bit characters, using the eighth bit of a byte to represent the *standout* feature (often implemented as bold and/or reverse video). The BSD curses library provided functions **standout** and **standend** which were carried along into X/Open Curses due to their pervasive use in legacy applications.

Some terminals in the 1980s could support a variety of video attributes, although the BSD curses library could do nothing with those. System V (1983) provided an improved curses library. It defined the **A\_** symbols for use by applications to manipulate the other attributes. There are few useful references for the chronology.

Goodheart's book *UNIX Curses Explained* (1991) describes SVr3 (1987), commenting on several functions:

- ⊕ the **attron**, **attroff**, **attrset** functions (and most of the functions found in SVr4 but not in BSD curses) were introduced by System V,
- ⊕ the alternate character set feature with **A\_ALTCHARSET** was added in SVr2 and improved in SVr3 (by adding **acs\_map[]**),
- ⊕ **start\_color** and related color-functions were introduced by System V.3.2,
- ⊕ pads, soft-keys were added in SVr3, and



Goodheart did not mention the background character or the **cchar\_t** type. Those are respectively SVr4 and X/Open features. He did mention the **A\_** constants, but did not indicate their values. Those were not the same in different systems, even for those marked as System V.

Different Unix systems used different sizes for the bit-fields in **chtype** for *characters* and *colors*, and took into account the different integer sizes (32-bit versus 64-bit).

This table showing the number of bits for **A\_COLOR** and **A\_CHARTEXT** was gleaned from the *curses* header files for various operating systems and architectures. The inferred architecture and notes reflect the format and size of the defined constants as well as clues such as the alternate character set implementation. A 32-bit library can be used on a 64-bit system, but not necessarily the reverse.

Year	System	Bits			Notes
		Arch	Color	Char	
1992	Solaris 5.2	32	6	17	SVr4 <i>curses</i>
1992	HP-UX 9	32	no	8	SVr2 <i>curses</i>
1992	AIX 3.2	32	no	23	SVr2 <i>curses</i>
1994	OSF/1 r3	32	no	23	SVr2 <i>curses</i>
1995	HP-UX 10.0032	32	6	16	SVr3 <i>curses_colr</i>
1995	HP-UX 10.0032	32	6	8	SVr4, X/Open <i>curses</i>
1995	Solaris 5.4	32/64	7	16	X/Open <i>curses</i>
1996	AIX 4.2	32	7	16	X/Open <i>curses</i>
1996	OSF/1 r4	32	6	16	X/Open <i>curses</i>
1997	HP-UX 11.0032	32	6	8	X/Open <i>curses</i>
2000	U/Win	32/64/31	7	16	uses <i>chtype</i>

Notes:

Regarding HP-UX,

- ⊕ HP-UX 10.20 (1996) added support for 64-bit PA-RISC processors in 1996.
- ⊕ HP-UX 10.30 (1997) marked "curses\_colr" obsolete. That version of curses was dropped with HP-UX 11.30 in 2006.

Regarding OSF/1 (and Tru64),

- ⊕ These used 64-bit hardware. Like *ncurses*, the OSF/1 curses interface is not customized for 32-bit and 64-bit versions.
- ⊕ Unlike other systems which evolved from AT&T code, OSF/1 provided a new implementation for X/Open curses.

Regarding Solaris,

- ⊕ The initial release of Solaris was in 1992.
- ⊕ The *xpg4* (X/Open) curses was developed by MKS from 1990 to 1995. Sun's copyright began in 1996.
- ⊕ Sun updated the X/Open curses interface after 64-bit support was introduced in 1997, but did not modify the SVr4 curses interface.

Regarding U/Win,

- ⊕ Development of the curses library began in 1991, stopped in 2000.
- ⊕ Color support was added in 1998.
- ⊕ The library uses only **chtype** (no **cchar\_t**).

Once X/Open curses was adopted in the mid-1990s, the constraint of a 32-bit interface with many colors and wide-characters for **chtype** became a moot point. The **cchar\_t** structure (whose size and members are not specified in X/Open Curses) could be extended as needed.

Other interfaces are rarely used now:

- ⊕ BSD curses was improved slightly in 1993/1994 using Keith Bostic's modification to make the

library 8-bit clean for **nvi**(1). He moved *standout* attribute to a structure member.

The resulting 4.4BSD *curses* was replaced by *ncurses* over the next ten years.

⊕ U/Win is rarely used now.

**SEE ALSO**

**curses(3X), curs\_addch(3X), curs\_addstr(3X), curs\_bkgd(3X), curs\_printw(3X), curs\_variables(3X)**