

The Unicode Standard currently covers over fifty scripts, totaling 96,000-plus characters. Several historic scripts are now in Unicode, including Greek, Linear B, the Cypriot syllabary, and “Old Italic” (which refers to Etruscan and related scripts used in ancient Italy). As a result of being included in Unicode, standardized fonts can be created, thereby facilitating the exchange of scholarly and pedagogical documents which may contain these scripts, and enabling searching within documents and across the Internet.

The inclusion of the historic scripts was achieved through the active participation of scholars who reviewed the Unicode proposals and wrote letters in support to the two standards bodies that must approve all new scripts and characters. However, more work needs to be done: over fifty historic scripts are not yet encoded, including Lycian, Lydian, Carian, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and Hieroglyphic Luwian. Additionally, individual characters needed for Latin epigraphy are known to be missing. These lacunae will cause problems for scholars who are working on electronic versions of texts or text materials in the future, because the characters will not be accessible in a standardized way, requiring special fonts or other work-arounds. Searching will also be impeded, impairing scholarly interchange.

The “window of opportunity” to get these scripts and characters into Unicode is approximately five years, when large corporations are expected to stop participating in Unicode development, since most “large” commercially viable scripts will have been completely implemented by then. As a result, it is incumbent upon Classicists to try to get the letters and symbols they need into Unicode in the near future, while computer companies are still actively participating. This will help to ensure a greater likelihood that the characters and scripts can be used in word processing programs and computer platforms available in the marketplace.

This talk will end with a brief description of the standards process and guidelines on how to identify a likely candidate for inclusion in Unicode, how to develop a script proposal (or locate a script proposal author), and where to turn for assistance.