CSE 303: Concepts and Tools for Software Development

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Spring 2007
Lecture 5— Regular Expressions (and more), grep, other utilities
Where are We

• We are done learning this bizarre pseudo-programming language called the shell (pick up more for hw2).

• Today: Specifying string patterns for many utilities, particularly grep and sed (also needed for hw2).
  – find vs. find-and-replace

• Friday: sed

• Monday: We start learning C.

Note: Start homework 2 early.
Globbing vs. Regular Expressions vs. ...

“Globbing” refers to filename expansion characters.

“Regular expressions” are a different but overlapping set of rules for specifying patterns to programs like grep. (Sometimes called “pattern matching”.)

More distinctions:

• Regular expressions a la CSE322
• “Regular expressions” in grep
• “Regular expressions” in egrep (same as grep -E)
• More subtle distinctions per program...
Real Regular Expressions

Some of the crispest, elegant, most useful CS theory out there.

What computer scientists know and ill-educated hackers don’t (to their detriment).

A regular expression $p$ may “match” a string $s$. If $p =$

- $a, b, \ldots$ matches the single character
- $p_1p_2, \ldots$ if we can write $s$ as $s_1s_2$, $p_1$ matches $s_1$, $p_2$ matches $s_2$.
- $p_1|p_2, \ldots$ if $p_1$ matches $s$ or $p_2$ matches $s$ (in egrep, for grep use $\mid$)
- $p_1^*$, if there is an $i \geq 0$ such that $p_1 \ldots p_1$ matches $s$.

(for $i = 0$, matches the zero-character string).

Lots of examples with egrep.
Why this language?

Amazing facts (see 322):

• Exactly the patterns that can be found by a program that can say \textit{before} it sees its input how much space it needs. (Decide if a 1GB string has a substring that matches...)

• You can write a program that takes two regular expressions and decides if one matches every string the other does.

• ... see CSE322
Conveniences

Lots of “conveniences” do not make the language any more powerful:

- $p_1 +$ is just $p_1p_1*$
- $p_1?$ is just $(|p_1)$
- $[zd-h]$ is just $z \mid d \mid e \mid f \mid g \mid h$
- $[^A-Z]$ and . are long but technically just conveniences.
- $p_1\{n\}$ is just $p_1 \cdots p_1$\hspace{2cm} n
- $p_1\{n,\}$ is just $p_1 \cdots p_1p_1*$ \hspace{.2cm} n
- $p_1\{n, m\}$ is just $p_1 \cdots p_1p_1? \cdots p_1?$ \hspace{.2cm} n \hspace{1cm} m
Beginning and end

Really `grep` is matching each line against `.*p.*`.

You can say that is not what you want with `^` (beginning) and `$` (end) or both (match whole line exactly).

I can’t think of a good reason to put these characters in the middle of a pattern, but you can.

Fundamentally, we are still in the realm of “real” regular expressions.
Nasty gotchas

- Special characters for one program not special for another.
- For example, I found \{ for grep but { for egrep.
- Must quote your patterns so the shell does not muck with them – and use single quotes if they contain $.
- Must escape special characters with \ if you need them literally: \. and . are very different.
  - But inside [] less quoting (so backslash becomes literal)!
Previous matches

• Up to 9 times in a pattern, you can group with \( p \) and refer to the matched text later! (Need backslashes in sed.)

• You can refer to the text (most recently) matched by the \( n^{th} \) one with \( \backslash n \).

• Simple example: double-words \( \backslash ([a-zA-Z]*\backslash)\backslash1\$ \)

• You cannot do this with regular expressions; the program must keep the previous strings.
  – Especially useful with sed because of substitutions.
Other Utilities

Some very useful programs you can learn on your own:

find (search for files, e.g., find /usr -name words)

diff (compare two files’ contents, output is easy for humans and programs to read (see all patch))

- Will use patch to submit part of hw2

Also:

For many programs the -r flag makes them recursive (apply to all files, subdirectories, subsubdirectories, ...).

So “delete everything on the computer” is cd /; rm -rf *
(be careful!)