Hypertext Transport Protocol
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HTTP Basics

- A client establishes one or more TCP connections to a server
  - The client sends a request for a web object over a connection and the server replies with the object’s contents

- We have to figure out how to let the client and server communicate their intentions to each other clearly
  - We have to define a protocol
Protocols

- A **protocol** is a set of rules governing the format and exchange of messages in a computing system
  - What messages can a client exchange with a server?
    - What is the syntax of a message?
    - What do the messages mean?
    - What are legal replies to a message?
  - What sequence of messages are legal?
    - How are errors conveyed?

- A protocol is (roughly) the network equivalent of an API
HTTP

- **Hypertext Transport Protocol**
  - A request / response protocol
    - A client (web browser) sends a request to a web server
    - The server processes the request and sends a response
  - Typically, a request asks a server to retrieve a resource
    - A resource is an object or document, named by a Uniform Resource Identifier (URI)
  - A response indicates whether or not the server succeeded
    - If so, it provides the content of the requested response
HTTP Requests

- General form:
  
  ![METHOD] [request-uri] HTTP/[version]\r\n  [headerfield1]: [fieldvalue1]\r\n  [headerfield2]: [fieldvalue2]\r\n  [...]  
  [headerfieldN]: [fieldvalueN]\r\n  \r\n  [request body, if any]

- Demo: use nc to see a real request
HTTP Methods

- There are three commonly-used HTTP methods:
  - **GET**: “please send me the named resource”
  - **POST**: “I’d like to submit data to you” (*e.g.* file upload)
  - **HEAD**: “Send me the headers for the named resource”
    - Doesn’t send resource; often to check if cached copy is still valid

- Other methods exist, but are much less common:
  - **PUT, DELETE, TRACE, OPTIONS, CONNECT, PATCH, . . .**
    - For instance: **TRACE** – “show any proxies or caches in between me and the server”
HTTP Versions

- All current browsers and servers “speak” **HTTP/1.1**
  - Version 1.1 of the HTTP protocol
    - [https://www.w3.org/Protocols/rfc2616/rfc2616.html](https://www.w3.org/Protocols/rfc2616/rfc2616.html)
  - Standardized in 1997 and meant to fix shortcomings of HTTP/1.0
    - Better performance, richer caching features, better support for multihomed servers, and much more

- **HTTP/2 standardized recently (published in 2015)**
  - Allows for higher performance but doesn’t change the basic web request/response model
  - Will coexist with HTTP/1.1 for a long time
Client Headers

- The client can provide zero or more request “headers”
  - These provide information to the server or modify how the server should process the request

- You’ll encounter many in practice
  - **Host**: the DNS name of the server
  - **User-Agent**: an identifying string naming the browser
  - **Accept**: the content types the client prefers or can accept
  - **Cookie**: an HTTP cookie previously set by the server

https://www.w3.org/Protocols/rfc2616/rfc2616-sec5.html
A Real Request

GET / HTTP/1.1
Host: attu.cs.washington.edu:3333
Connection: keep-alive
Upgrade-Insecure-Requests: 1
User-Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (Windows NT 10.0; Win64; x64) AppleWebKit/537.36 (KHTML, like Gecko) Chrome/66.0.3359.181 Safari/537.36
Accept: text/html,application/xhtml+xml,application/xml;q=0.9,image/webp,image/apng,*/*;q=0.8
DNT: 1
Accept-Encoding: gzip, deflate
Accept-Language: en-US,en;q=0.9
Cookie: SESS0c8e598bbe17200b27e1d0a18f9a42bb=5c18d7ed6d369d56b69a1c0aa441d78f; SESSd47cbe79be51e625cab059451de75072=d137dbe7bbe1e90149797dcd89c639b1; _sdsat_DMC_or_CCODE=null; _sdsat_utm_source=; _sdsat_utm_medium=; _sdsat_utm_term=; _sdsat_utm_content=; adblock=blocked; s_fid=50771A3AC73B3FFF-3F18ABD559FFB5D; s_cc=true; prev_page=science.%3A%2Fcontent%2F347%2F6219%2F262%2Ftab-pdf; ist_usr_page=1; sat_ppv=79; ajs_anonymous_id=%229225b8cf-6637-49c8-8568-ecb53cfc760c%22; ajs_user_id=null; ajs_group_id=null; __utma=59807807.316184303.1491952757.1496310296.1496310296.1; __utmc=59807807; __utmc=80...
HTTP Responses

- General form:
  - `HTTP/[version] [status code] [reason]\r\n  [headerfield1]: [fieldvalue1]\r\n  [headerfield2]: [fieldvalue2]\r\n  [...]\n  [headerfieldN]: [fieldvalueN]\r\n  \r\n  [response body, if any]`

- Demo: use telnet to see a real response
Status Codes and Reason

- **Code**: numeric outcome of the request – easy for computers to interpret
  - A 3-digit integer with the 1st digit indicating a response category
    - 1xx: Informational message
    - 2xx: Success
    - 3xx: Redirect to a different URL
    - 4xx: Error in the client’s request
    - 5xx: Error experienced by the server

- **Reason**: human-readable explanation
  - e.g. “OK” or “Moved Temporarily”
Common Statuses

- **HTTP/1.1 200 OK**
  - The request succeeded and the requested object is sent

- **HTTP/1.1 404 Not Found**
  - The requested object was not found

- **HTTP/1.1 301 Moved Permanently**
  - The object exists, but its name has changed
    - The new URL is given as the “Location:” header value

- **HTTP/1.1 500 Server Error**
  - The server had some kind of unexpected error
Server Headers

- The server can provide zero or more response “headers”
  - These provide information to the client or modify how the client should process the response

- You’ll encounter many in practice
  - **Server**: a string identifying the server software
  - **Content-Type**: the type of the requested object
  - **Content-Length**: size of requested object
  - **Last-Modified**: a date indicating the last time the request object was modified

[https://www.w3.org/Protocols/rfc2616/rfc2616-sec6.html](https://www.w3.org/Protocols/rfc2616/rfc2616-sec6.html)
A Real Response

HTTP/1.1 200 OK
Date: Mon, 21 May 2018 07:58:46 GMT
Server: Apache/2.2.32 (Unix) mod_ssl/2.2.32 OpenSSL/1.0.1e-fips
       mod_pubcookie/3.3.4a mod_uwa/3.2.1 Phusion_Passenger/3.0.11
Last-Modified: Mon, 21 May 2018 07:58:05 GMT
ETag: "2299e1ef-52-56cb2a9615625"
Accept-Ranges: bytes
Content-Length: 82
Vary: Accept-Encoding,User-Agent
Connection: close
Content-Type: text/html
Set-Cookie: bbbbbb=5b87773b27df0ba812157b3d34e8f06f; HttpOnly

<html><body>
<font color="chartreuse" size="18pt">Awesome!!</font>
</body></html>
Cool HTTP/1.1 Features

◆ “Chunked Transfer-Encoding”
  ▪ A server might not know how big a response object is
    • *e.g.* dynamically-generated content in response to a query or other user input
  ▪ How do you send Content-Length?
    • Could wait until you’ve finished generating the response, but that’s not great in terms of *latency* – we want to start sending the response right away

◆ Chunked message body: response is a series of chunks
Cool HTTP/1.1 Features

- Persistent connections
  - Establishing a TCP connection is costly
    - Multiple network round trips to set up the TCP connection
    - TCP has a feature called “slow start”; slowly grows the rate at which a TCP connection transmits to avoid overwhelming networks
  - A web page consists of multiple objects and a client probably visits several pages on the same server
    - Bad idea: separate TCP connection for each object
    - Better idea: single TCP connection, multiple requests
20 years later...

- World has changed since HTTP/1.1 was adopted
  - Web pages were a few hundred KB with a few dozen objects on each page, now several MB each with hundreds of objects (JS, graphics, ...) & multiple domains per page
  - Much larger ecosystem of devices (phones especially)
  - Many hacks used to make HTTP/1.1 performance tolerable
    - Multiple TCP sockets from browser to server
    - Caching tricks; JS/CSS ordering and loading tricks; cookie hacks
    - Compression/image optimizations; splitting/sharding requests
    - etc., etc. ...
HTTP/2

- Based on Google SPDY; standardized in 2015
  - Binary protocol - easier parsing by machines (harder for humans); sizes in headers, not discovered as requests are processed; ...
    - But same core request/response model (GET, POST, OK, ...)
  - Multiple data streams multiplexed on single TCP connections
  - Header compression, server push, object priorities, more...

- All existing implementations incorporate TLS encryption (https)
- Supported by all major browsers and servers since ~2015
- Widely used now by all major web sites
  - Coexists with HTTP/1.1
  - HTTP/2 used automatically when browser and server both support it
Extra Exercise #1

- Write a program that:
  - Creates a listening socket that accepts connections from clients
  - Reads a line of text from the client
  - Parses the line of text as a DNS name
  - Connects to that DNS name on port 80
  - Writes a valid HTTP request for “/”
    - GET / HTTP/1.1\r\n    Host: <DNS name>\r\n    Connection: close\r\n    \r\n  - Reads the reply and returns it to the client