REST Architecture and RESTful APIs

Lecture 10: CPEN 400A

Based on CS498RK taught at UIUC (used with permission), and

Roy Fielding's PhD thesis at UC Irvine

Outline

- **What is REST ?**
- HTTP and REST
- RestFul APIs

REST

- Stands for Representational State Transfer
- Proposed by Roy Fielding at UC Irvine as part of his PhD dissertation
  - Already implemented in Apache web server by Roy
  - Basis for much of the modern web and its design
  - Original definition has been significantly extended

So what's this REST thing ?

- REST is what you've been doing already in web applications. Example: accessing a URL
  - It's an architectural style, NOT a standard
  - Set of design principles and constraints that characterize web applications

- But REST is a general principle that goes beyond Web (web is one implementation)

Why REST ?

- Performance
- Scalability
- Simplicity of interfaces
- Modifiability of components to meet changing needs
- Visibility of communication between components by service agents
- Portability of components by moving program code with the data
- Reliability or the resistance to failure at the system level

The five principles of REST

- Client-Server
- Statelessness
- Cacheable
- Layered System
- **Uniform Interface (this is the most important)**

Client-Server

- Clear separation between clients and servers
- Servers and clients can be replaced and developed independently as long as the interface between them is not altered

Stateless

- Server doesn't know about client's application state – passed in by client
- Server is replaceable and can pass session state to another server or database
- Pass representations around to change state
  - Representation must contain all the needed info

Cacheable

- Caching improves performance, but can compromise on freshness
- Responses are assumed to be cacheable by default
- If response does not wish to be cached, it must explicitly mark itself as such

Layered System

- Client should not be able to tell if it is directly connected to server or through an intermediary (e.g., proxy, firewall etc)
- Allows scalability, for example, thro' load balancing
- Security policies may be applied at proxy

Uniform Interface

- Identification of resources
- Manipulation of resources through these representations
- Self-descriptive messages
- **hypermedia** as the engine of application state (HATEOAS)

Outline

- What is REST ?
- **HTTP and REST**
- RestFul APIs

HTTP

Hypertext Transfer Protocol

request-response protocol

“all about applying verbs to nouns”

nouns: resources (*i.e.*, concepts)

verbs: GET, POST, PUT, DELETE

Resources

If your users might “want to create a hypertext link to it, make or refute assertions about it, retrieve or cache a representation of it, include all or part of it by reference into another representation, annotate it, or perform other operations on it”, make it a resource

can be anything: a document, a row in a database, the result of running an algorithm, etc.

www.w3.org/TR/2004/REC-webarch-20041215/

URL

Uniform Resource Locator

every resource must have a URL

type of URI (Identifier)

specifies the location of a resource on a network

REPRESENTATION OF RESOURCES

when a client issues a GET request for a resource, server responds with **representations** of resources and not the resources themselves

any machine-readable document containing any information about a resource

server may send data from its database as HTML, XML, JSON, etc.

web.archive.org/web/20130116005443/http://tomayko.com/writings/rest-to-my-wife

Representational State Transfer

- Representations are transferred back and forth from client and server
- Server sends a representation describing the state of a resource
- Client sends a representation describing the state it would like the resource to have

Multiple Representations

- A resource can have more than one representation: different languages, different formats (HTML, XML, JSON)
- Client can distinguish between representations based on the value of Content-Type (HTTP header)
- A resource can have multiple representations —one URL for every representation

Http Methods

GET Get a representation of resource

DELETE Destroy resource

POST Create a new resource based on the given representation

PUT Replace resource state with the one described in the given representation

HEAD Get the headers that would be sent with a representation, but not the representation itself

OPTIONS Discover which HTTP methods this resource responds to

PATCH Modify part of the state of this resource based on the given representation

GET Method

- Retrieve representations of resources
- No side effects: not intended to change any resource state
- No data in request body
- Response codes: 200 (OK), 302 (Moved Permanently), 404 (Not Found)
- Safe method (i.e., does not modify resources)

Delete Method

- Destroy a resource on the server
- Success response codes: 200 (OK), 204 (No Content), 202 (Accepted)
- Not safe, but idempotent (i.e., can be called many times but will always return same value)
  - Why is this important ?

Post Request

- Upload data from the browser to server
  - Usually means “create a new resource,” but can be used to convey *any* kind of change: PUT, DELETE, etc.
  - Side effects are likely
- Data contained in request body
- Success response codes: 201 (Created), **Location** header contains URL for created resource; 202 (Accepted), new resource will be created in the future
- Neither safe nor idempotent

Put Method

- Request to modify resource state
- Success response codes: 200 (OK), 204 (No Content)
- If state is not found on server, it is created
- Can also be used like POST idempotent
  - Not widely used in practice

Patch Method

- Representations can be big: PUTs can be inefficient
- Send the server the parts of the document you want to change
- Neither safe nor idempotent

Outline

- What is REST ?
- HTTP and REST
- **RestFul APIs**

Web API

- Application program interface (API) to a defined request-response message system between clients and servers
  - Accessible via standard HTTP methods

- Request URLs that transfer representations (JSON, XML)

Rest Vs. Soap (spf13.com/post/soap-vs-rest)

- resources (**REST)** Vs. operations (SOAP)
- **SOAP:** security, ACID transactions, reliable messaging
- **REST:** simplicity, scalability and extensibility

Restful APIs: Features

- Application program interface to a defined request-response message system between clients and servers
- Accessible via standard HTTP methods
- Request URLs that transfer representations (JSON, XML)

Designing Restful APIs

Collections

<VERB> http://example.com/users

GET Return all the objects in the collection

POST Create a new entry in the collection; automatically assign new URI and return it

PUT and **DELETE** not generally used

Elements

`VERB> http://example.com/users/1234`

GET Return the specific object in collection

PUT Replace object with another one

DELETE Delete element

POST not generally used

Using Parameters

```
<VERB> http://example.com/users/12345?
    where={"num_posts":{"$gt":100}}}
```

other parameters can be used to select fields, sort, etc.

parameters can also be URL-encoded

Pagination

```
GET http://example.com/users?
    offset=60&limit=20
```

`offset` *ith object & limit*

`limit` *number of returned objects*

can also use **`Link`** header to specify next, prev, first, last URLs

CheckList: Restful APIs

- Use nouns but no verbs, Use plural nouns.
- Don’t expose irrelevant nouns
- GET method and query parameters should not alter the state
- Use parameters to filter, sort, and select fields from collections
- Use offset and limit parameters to paginate results

Class Activity

- Design a simple REST API to perform the following actions in a Phonebook application
  - Retrieve the list of all contacts in the phonebook
  - Retrieve a specific contact given their key
  - Retrieve the info of a specific contact given their first name and last name
  - Add a new contact to the phonebook
  - Modify the details of an existing contact
  - Remove a contact from the phonebook

Solution to the Activity - Retrieval

- Use nouns rather than verbs to request resources
  - To request all contacts, use
    - GET foo.com/contacts
  - To request a specific contact given a key, use
    - GET foo.com/contacts/12345
  - To request a specific contact (first-name and last name given),
    - GET foo.com/contacts?fname=“”&lname=“”

Solution to the Activity - Add

- Add should be a POST request as it modifies the state of contacts, and is not idempotent

POST foo.com/AddContact/

Send contact details in the body of the request, as JSON formatted object (say)

Solution to the Activity - Modify

- Can use PUT if key is known (better than POST as it's idempotent). Can also use PATCH for partial updates to save bandwidth.

PUT foo.com/Contacts/12345

Send the new data (to be modified) in the body of the PUT request

Solution to the Activity – Delete

- Use Delete method in HTTP to remove the object given its key (idempotent)

DELETE foo.com/contacts/12345

can also be used for multiple contacts as follows

DELETE foo.com/contacts?firstName="Jack"

Outline

- What is REST ?
- HTTP and REST
- RestFul APIs