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Uniform Resource Locators (URL)

Status of this Memo

This document specifies an Internet standards track protocol for the Internet community, and requests discussion and suggestions for improvements. Please refer to the current edition of the "Internet Official Protocol Standards" (STD 1) for the standardization state and status of this protocol. Distribution of this memo is unlimited.

Abstract

This document specifies a Uniform Resource Locator (URL), the syntax and semantics of formalized information for location and access of resources via the Internet.

1. Introduction

This document describes the syntax and semantics for a compact string representation for a resource available via the Internet. These strings are called "Uniform Resource Locators" (URLs).

The specification is derived from concepts introduced by the World-Wide Web global information initiative, whose use of such objects dates from 1990 and is described in "Universal Resource Identifiers in WWW", RFC 1630. The specification of URLs is designed to meet the requirements laid out in "Functional Requirements for Internet Resource Locators" [12].

This document was written by the URI working group of the Internet Engineering Task Force. Comments may be addressed to the editors, or to the URI-WG <uri@bunyip.com>. Discussions of the group are archived at <[URL:http://www.acl.lanl.gov/URI/archive/uri-archive.index.html](http://www.acl.lanl.gov/URI/archive/uri-archive.index.html)>

Just as there are many different methods of access to resources, there are several schemes for describing the location of such resources.

The generic syntax for URLs provides a framework for new schemes to be established using protocols other than those defined in this document.

URLs are used to 'locate' resources, by providing an abstract identification of the resource location. Having located a resource, a system may perform a variety of operations on the resource, as might be characterized by such words as 'access', 'update', 'replace', 'find attributes'. In general, only the 'access' method needs to be specified for any URL scheme.

2.1. The main parts of URLs

A full BNF description of the URL syntax is given in Section 5.

In general, URLs are written as follows:

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<scheme>:<scheme-specific-part>
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A URL contains the name of the scheme being used (<scheme>) followed by a colon and then a string (the <scheme-specific-part>) whose interpretation depends on the scheme.

Scheme names consist of a sequence of characters. The lower case letters "a"--"z", digits, and the characters plus ("+"), period ("."), and hyphen ("-") are allowed. For resiliency, programs interpreting URLs should treat upper case letters as equivalent to lower case in scheme names (e.g., allow "HTTP" as well as "http").

2.2. URL Character Encoding Issues

URLs are sequences of characters, i.e., letters, digits, and special characters. A URL may be represented in a variety of ways: e.g., ink on paper, or a sequence of octets in a coded character set. The interpretation of a URL depends only on the identity of the characters used.

In most URL schemes, the sequences of characters in different parts of a URL are used to represent sequences of octets used in Internet protocols. For example, in the ftp scheme, the host name, directory name and file names are such sequences of octets, represented by parts of the URL. Within those parts, an octet may be represented by

Berners-Lee, Masinter & McCahill

[Page 2]

RFC 1738

Uniform Resource Locators (URL)

December 1994

the character which has that octet as its code within the US-ASCII [20] coded character set.

In addition, octets may be encoded by a character triplet consisting of the character "%" followed by the two hexadecimal digits (from "0123456789ABCDEF") which forming the hexadecimal value of the octet. (The characters "abcdef" may also be used in hexadecimal encodings.)

Octets must be encoded if they have no corresponding graphic

is reserved for some other interpretation within the particular URL scheme.

No corresponding graphic US-ASCII:

URLs are written only with the graphic printable characters of the US-ASCII coded character set. The octets 80-FF hexadecimal are not used in US-ASCII, and the octets 00-1F and 7F hexadecimal represent control characters; these must be encoded.

Unsafe:

Characters can be unsafe for a number of reasons. The space character is unsafe because significant spaces may disappear and insignificant spaces may be introduced when URLs are transcribed or typeset or subjected to the treatment of word-processing programs. The characters "<" and ">" are unsafe because they are used as the delimiters around URLs in free text; the quote mark ("") is used to delimit URLs in some systems. The character "#" is unsafe and should always be encoded because it is used in World Wide Web and in other systems to delimit a URL from a fragment/anchor identifier that might follow it. The character "%" is unsafe because it is used for encodings of other characters. Other characters are unsafe because gateways and other transport agents are known to sometimes modify such characters. These characters are "{", "}", "|", "\", "^", "~", "[", "]", and "`".

All unsafe characters must always be encoded within a URL. For example, the character "#" must be encoded within URLs even in systems that do not normally deal with fragment or anchor identifiers, so that if the URL is copied into another system that does use them, it will not be necessary to change the URL encoding.

Reserved:

Many URL schemes reserve certain characters for a special meaning: their appearance in the scheme-specific part of the URL has a designated semantics. If the character corresponding to an octet is reserved in a scheme, the octet must be encoded. The characters ";", "/", "?", ":", "@", "=", and "&" are the characters which may be reserved for special meaning within a scheme. No other characters may be reserved within a scheme.

Usually a URL has the same interpretation when an octet is represented by a character and when it encoded. However, this is not true for reserved characters: encoding a character reserved for a particular scheme may change the semantics of a URL.

Thus, only alphanumerics, the special characters "\$-_.+!*'()", and reserved characters used for their reserved purposes may be used unencoded within a URL.

(including alphanumerics) may be encoded within the scheme-specific part of a URL, as long as they are not being used for a reserved purpose.

2.3 Hierarchical schemes and relative links

In some cases, URLs are used to locate resources that contain pointers to other resources. In some cases, those pointers are represented as relative links where the expression of the location of the second resource is in terms of "in the same place as this one except with the following relative path". Relative links are not described in this document. However, the use of relative links depends on the original URL containing a hierarchical structure against which the relative link is based.

Some URL schemes (such as the ftp, http, and file schemes) contain names that can be considered hierarchical; the components of the hierarchy are separated by "/".

Berners-Lee, Masinter & McCahill

[Page 4]

RFC 1738

Uniform Resource Locators (URL)

December 1994

3. Specific Schemes

The mapping for some existing standard and experimental protocols is outlined in the BNF syntax definition. Notes on particular protocols follow. The schemes covered are:

ftp	File Transfer protocol
http	Hypertext Transfer Protocol
gopher	The Gopher protocol
mailto	Electronic mail address
news	USENET news
nntp	USENET news using NNTP access
telnet	Reference to interactive sessions
wais	Wide Area Information Servers
file	Host-specific file names
prospero	Prospero Directory Service

Other schemes may be specified by future specifications. Section 4 of this document describes how new schemes may be registered, and lists some scheme names that are under development.

3.1. Common Internet Scheme Syntax

While the syntax for the rest of the URL may vary depending on the particular scheme selected, URL schemes that involve the direct use of an IP-based protocol to a specified host on the Internet use a common syntax for the scheme-specific data:

Some or all of the parts "<user>:<password>@", ":", "<password>", ":", "<port>", and "</url-path>" may be excluded. The scheme specific data start with a double slash "/" to indicate that it complies with the common Internet scheme syntax. The different components obey the following rules:

user

An optional user name. Some schemes (e.g., ftp) allow the specification of a user name.

password

An optional password. If present, it follows the user name separated from it by a colon.

The user name (and password), if present, are followed by a commercial at-sign "@". Within the user and password field, any ":", "@", or "/" must be encoded.

Note that an empty user name or password is different than no user name or password; there is no way to specify a password without specifying a user name. E.g., <URL:ftp://@host.com/> has an empty user name and no password, <URL:ftp://host.com/> has no user name, while <URL:ftp://foo:@host.com/> has a user name of "foo" and an empty password.

host

The fully qualified domain name of a network host, or its IP address as a set of four decimal digit groups separated by ".". Fully qualified domain names take the form as described in Section 3.5 of RFC 1034 [13] and Section 2.1 of RFC 1123 [5]: a sequence of domain labels separated by ".", each domain label starting and ending with an alphanumerical character and possibly also containing "-" characters. The rightmost domain label will never start with a digit, though, which syntactically distinguishes all domain names from the IP addresses.

port

The port number to connect to. Most schemes designate protocols that have a default port number. Another port number may optionally be supplied, in decimal, separated from the host by a colon. If the port is omitted, the colon is as well.

url-path

The rest of the locator consists of data specific to the scheme, and is known as the "url-path". It supplies the details of how the specified resource can be accessed. Note that the "/" between the host (or port) and the url-path is NOT part of the url-path.

The url-path syntax depends on the scheme being used, as does the manner in which it is interpreted.

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