

## CS306: Introduction to Perl

### Section #9: Pattern Matching and Regular Expressions

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### What are Regular Expressions?

- A regular expression is simply a template which defines a set of rules. Then you compare any given string to this template, and the result is either “match” or “doesn't match”.
- Regular expression syntax is its own mini-language which you use to write the mini programs, or templates.

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## Section 9: Pattern Matching and Regular Expressions

### Introduction

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### What are Regular Expressions? Con't

- Regular expressions are not unique to perl - UNIX utilities like the shell, sed, awk, egrep and others support regular expressions, as do other languages.
- However, Perl does have arguably (although, it's a very strong argument) the best implementation of regular expressions on the planet.

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## What are Regular Expressions? Con't

- You may notice that Perl often refers to regular expressions as patterns, and that pattern matching refers to using a regular expression to match against a string.
- Your instructor often refers to them as “regex”es, and you'll see that usage elsewhere too.

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## Pattern Behavior

- A pattern by default tries to match anywhere in the string.
- You can think of it as starting at the front of the string and “sliding” along the string until it matches or reaches the end.
- **The Leftmost Longest Rule.** Given a choice, a pattern will make the leftmost, longest match it can. This is very important. (Hint, Hint).

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## Simple Patterns

- `$_ = “Hello world!”;`  
`if (/ello/) {`  
    `print “Match!\n”;`  
`}`
- The `/ello/` is the regular expression. It looks for “ello” **anywhere** in a string (in this case, `$_`).
- The `//` act just like “`“`”, so all escapes like `\t` work. For example, `/fran\tinstructor/` #looks for a tab

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## Metacharacters

- Metacharacters allow us to be less literal in our patterns
- `.` - anything except `\n`
- `*` - match preceding thing zero or more times
- `+` - match preceding thing one or more times
- `?` - match preceding thing zero or one times
- The `\` turns metacharacters back into regular ones

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## Metacharacter examples

- `/Fran.Fabrizio/`

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## Metacharacter examples

- `/Fran.Fabrizio/`
  - `FranLFabrizio`
  - `Mr. Fran Fabrizio`
  - `FranFabrizio`
  - `Fran\Fabrizio`
  - `Francis Fabrizio`

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## Metacharacter examples

- `/Fran.Fabrizio/`
  - `FranLFabrizio`
  - `Mr. Fran Fabrizio`
  - `FranFabrizio` # No match
  - `Fran\Fabrizio`
  - `Francis Fabrizio` # No match

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## Metacharacter Examples

- `/Hello*World/`

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## Metacharacter Examples

- `/Hello *World/`
  - Hello World Leaders
  - Hello World
  - Helloo World
  - HelloWorld

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## Metacharacter Examples

- `/Hello *World/`
  - Hello World Leaders
  - Hello World
  - Helloo World # No match
  - HelloWorld

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## Metacharacter Examples

- `/books?/`
  - Matches book and books
- `/Echo+/`
  - Matches Echo, Echoo, Echooo, Echoooo etc...

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## Metacharacter Combinations

- `/hey.*there/`
  - "Hey, followed by zero or more anything characters, followed by there"
  - Which match?
    - hey there
    - hey Joe, how's the weather there in Phoenix?
    - they are late again, and therein lies the problem

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## Metacharacter Combinations

- `/hey.*there/`
  - “Hey, followed by zero or more anything characters, followed by there”
  - Which match?
    - hey there
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    - they are late again, and therein lies the problem

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## Grouping Patterns

- Use `()` to group characters
- `/(fred)+/`
  - One or more “fred”s
  - Matches:
    - fred
    - fredfredfred
    - barneyfredbambam
    - Alfred, pull the Batmobile around to the front please.

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## “Or” in Patterns

- Use the pipe `|` character
- `/Perl|Java|C/`
  - What's the English translation?
- `/Fran( \t)+Fabrizio/`
  - What's the English translation?
- `/Fran( +\t+)Fabrizio`
  - What's the English translation?

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## Saying “or” in Patterns

- Use the pipe `|` character
- `/Perl|Java|C/`
  - “Perl or Java or C”
- `/Fran( \t)+Fabrizio/`
  - “Fran, followed by one or more spaces or tabs in any combination, followed by Fabrizio”
- `/Fran( +\t+)Fabrizio`
  - now it has to be all spaces or all tabs, not mixed

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## Character Classes

- A *character class* appears between [ ] and matches any single character in the class.
- [abcdxyz] - match any of those seven characters.
- [a-zA-Z] - you can use ranges in character classes
- /0x[0-9A-Fa-f]+/ - match hexadecimal numbers

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## Saying “not” in Character Classes

- Use the ^ at the beginning to say “not”. Sometimes that's easier.
- [^aeiou] - will match anything BUT lowercase vowels

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## Magic Character Class Shortcuts

- Some character classes are so common they have magic shortcuts
- \d is short for [0-9] (“digit” character)
- \w is short for [0-9a-zA-Z\_] (“word” character)
- \s is short for [\f\t\n\r ] (“whitespace” character)
- Note that these abbreviations eliminate the [ ] too.  
So, /cs[0-9]+/ becomes /cs\d+/

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## Everything but the shortcuts...

- \d means “any digit character”. \D means “anything but a digit character”.
- \w means “any word character”. \W means “anything but a word character.”
- You see the pattern. \S is “any non-whitespace character”.

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## Nested Shortcuts

- They work inside of other patterns. So, our hexadecimal pattern can be rewritten as `/0x[\dA-Fa-f]+/`

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## Quantifiers

- We've seen some already:
  - \* - zero or more
  - + - one or more
  - ? - zero or one
- Others:
  - {3} - exactly 3 times. `\w{3}/`
  - {3,} - at least 3 times `/(fred){3,}/`
  - {,3} - DOESN'T WORK!

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## Anchors

- *Anchors* force the pattern to match at a specific place, rather than sliding down the string looking for a match
- `^` - match at the beginning of a string.
  - This `^` is different than the one inside of character classes, which means “not”
- `$` - match at the end of a string
- `\b` - match at a word boundary (`\B` is opposite)

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## Anchor Examples

- `/^Subject/` - look for a line that begins “Subject”
- `/phone home$/` - look for a line that ends “phone home”.
  - A note here: `$` matches either at the end of a string or at a newline at the end of a string. Therefore, it will match “phone home” and “phone home\n”
- `/^\s*$/` - Who can tell me what this one does?

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## More Anchor Examples

- A word boundary is the beginning or end of a group of `\w` characters
- `\bman\b/` - matches “a man apart” but not “marksmanship”, “mailman” or “mantle”
- `\Bman\b/` - Any word that ends in “...man”
- Note that “Let's go!” has three “words”... “Let”, “s” and “go”. The ' is not a `\w` character. So it doesn't quite mean “word” in the English sense

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## Remembering Matches

- `()` have previously been used for grouping patterns, like `/(fred)+/` is one or more “fred”s
- `()` are also *memory parentheses*. When you use the `()`, the regular expression engine remembers the substring that matched that part of the pattern.
- So, if `/d+/` matches one or more digits, `/(d+)/` also matches one or more digits, and remembers which digits caused the match

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## Memory Example

- `/^Subject: (.*)/` - will match from the beginning of the string “Subject: “ and then zero or more anything and remember those zero or more anything. i.e. it will grab the rest of the line.
- So, “Subject: Pizza Party Friday”, the memory would be “Pizza Party Friday”

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## Multiple Memories

- `/(\d{3})-(\d{3})-(\d{4})/` - phone number, remembering each piece separately
- `/(\w+) (\d+), (\d+)/` - Month, day, year
  - Jan 6, 2005
  - January 06, 2005

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## Accessing Memory - Backreferences

- The first memory parens are mapped to \1, the second to \2, etc...
- You can then use these backreferences later in the pattern
- `/([*_])\w+\1/`
  - This will match `*hello*` and `_hello_` but not `*hello_`

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## Backreferences Continued

- `/(fred|barney) (wilma|betty) \1 \2/`
  - Will these match?  
fred wilma fred wilma  
fred betty barney betty  
fred betty fred betty  
barney betty barney betty  
fred wilma wilma fred

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## Backreferences Continued

- `/(fred|barney) (wilma|betty) \1 \2/`
  - Will these match?  
fred wilma fred wilma - YES  
fred betty barney betty - NO  
fred betty fred betty - YES  
barney betty barney betty - YES  
fred wilma wilma fred - NO

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## Take a Breather

- Everything we just talked about was general to regular expressions and pattern matching. Very little of it was Perl-specific
- Now we will look at how to use patterns within perl to do powerful things

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## The m// match operator

- This is what we've been doing all along today, with the /pattern/ syntax. We use the match operator m/pattern/ to test a pattern on a string.
- Just like qw//, the m/pattern/ can use other delimiters besides //. For instance, m#pattern# or m!pattern!.
- However, when using the m/pattern/ form we can omit the m, leaving just /pattern/

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## m// and \$\_

- By default, /pattern/ matches against the default variable \$\_
- while (<>) {  
    if (/^Subject:/) {  
        print "Found the subject line: \$\_\n";  
    }  
}

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## Option Modifiers

- Case-insensitive matching: m/pattern/i
- Making . match \n: m/pattern/s

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## When m/pattern/i Is Useful

- while (<>) {  
    if (/^received:/i) {  
        print "Found a received: header: \$\_\n";  
    }  
}
- This will match lines that begin with Received:, received:, rEcEiVeD:, etc....

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## When m/pattern/s Is Useful

- Say we have this as input:  
The C-USA tournament was won by UAB.\n  
The Blazers beat Memphis in the final.\n
- We want to find any mention of “UAB” followed somewhere by “Blazers”
- /UAB.\*Blazers/ will fail because the . does not match a \n, so they'd have to be on the same line
- /UAB.\*Blazers/s will match the above text

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## Combining Modifiers

- /UAB.\*Blazers/is applies both modifiers.
- Input:  
Uab won with a combination of scoring and defense.\n  
Final: BLAZERS 82 Tigers 65\n
- The pattern above will find this match because of the case-insensitivity of i and the newline matching of s

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## Matching on Variables Besides \$\_

- Use the binding operator =~
- my \$string = “Twain\tHuck Finn”;  
my \$did\_it\_match = \$string =~ /\w+\t\w+/;
- Will look in \$string for one or more word characters at the start of the string, followed by a tab, followed by one or more word characters
- if (\$line =~ /^From/) {  
    print “New message found.\n”;  
}

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## Storing Patterns in Variables

- my \$search = 'cats';  
my \$string = “It's raining cats and dogs.”;  
if (\$string =~ /(\$search)/) {  
    print “I found what you're looking for.\n”;  
}
- my \$search = shift @ARGV;  
# Then we call the program like ./search.pl cats  
# or ./search.pl mooseldogs  
# ./search.pl goat(deer -- oops, code broken

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## Accessing Memory - Match Variables

- We talked about how \1 and \2 can access the regular expression memory if ( ) are used in a pattern.
- However, we could only use the backreferences elsewhere in the same pattern
- Using match variables, we can use the memory elsewhere

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## Match Variable Example

- print “Enter phone no. (XXX-XXX-XXXX): “;  
chomp(my \$number = <STDIN>);  
if (\$number =~ /(\d{3})-(\d{3})-(\d{4})/) {  
    my (\$areacode, \$prefix, \$num) = (\$1, \$2, \$3);  
} else {  
    print “Phone number invalid.\n”;  
}  
} else {  
    print “Phone number invalid.\n”;  
}
- \$1, \$2, \$3, etc... are the match variables

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## Match Variable Shortcut

- print “Enter phone no. (XXX-XXX-XXXX): “;  
chomp(my \$pn = <STDIN>);  
unless (my (\$ac, \$pf, \$num) = \$pn  
    =~ /(\d{3})-(\d{3})-(\d{4})/) {  
    print “Phone number invalid.\n”;  
}  
}
- In list context, the regular expression returns a list of the memory vars, enabling syntax above.

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## \$`, \$& and \$'

- These hold the parts of the string before (\$`), in (\$&) and after (\$) the match.
- \$` . \$& . \$' is guaranteed to re-create the entire original string
- “It is very hot outside” =~ /s(hot)\s/;  
\$` is...  
\$& is...  
\$' is...  
\$1 is...

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## \$`, \$& and \$'

- These hold the parts of the string before (\$`), in (\$&) and after (\$') the match.
- \$` . \$& . \$' is guaranteed to re-create the entire original string
- “It is very hot outside” =~ /s(hot)\s/;  
\$` is “It is very”  
\$& is “ hot “  
\$' is “outside”  
\$1 is “hot”

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## Persistence of Match Variables

- The match variables get populated on successful match, and stay populated until next -successful-match.
- This implies that you should always check for success when doing a pattern match, otherwise you might not have what you think in \$1, \$2, ...
- So, patterns almost always in if() or while()

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## Substitution with the s/// operator

- “Search and Replace”
  - my \$str = “Today's class is on Wednesday”;  
\$str =~ s/Wednesday/Thursday/;
- my \$str = “I'm playing racquetball with Hari today.\n”;  
\$str =~ s/with ([A-Z]\w+)/against \$1/;

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## Global Search and Replace

- Use the g modifier
  - my \$str = “I play racquetball with Hari today and with Vijay tomorrow.\n”;
- \$str =~ s/with ([A-Z]\w+)/against \$1/g;
- # Now str is “I play racquetball against Hari today and against Vijay tomorrow.\n”;

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## A Couple of Notes

- Modifiers `i` and `s` also work here like with `m//`
- Different delimiters too: `s#word#newword#`
- `s///` will also work on `$_` in the absence of the binding operator `=~`
- A common bug:

```
$str = s/someword/someotherword/g;
```

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## Using patterns with `split()`

- We've already seen things like:  

```
my $str = "The cow jumped over the moon.";
my @words = split //, $str;
```
- The `//` is a pattern. So this also works:  

```
my $str = "Fee FiFoFnFum";
my @words = split /\s+/, $str;
```

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## Phew, You Made It

- This will all take a while to get used to, it takes practice.
- These are just the basics, patterns can get -extremely- complex. Do not get overwhelmed by the book info, these slides provide all the stuff you need to be productive with patterns.
- Practice reading patterns like sentences of any other language.

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