

PRIMIX SOLUTIONS

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Tapestry Developer's Guide

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Table of Contents

Introduction: What is Tapestry?	3	Understanding the Request Cycle	42
Scripting vs. Components	3	Page service	42
Interaction	7	Direct service	43
Security	8	Action service	44
Features	8	Action service and forms	46
Web Applications	10	Provided Components	47
Tapestry Components	12	Action	47
Parameters and Bindings	12	Any	47
Embedded Components	13	Body	48
HTML Templates	14	Checkbox	48
Localization	18	Conditional	48
Assets	18	DatabaseQuery	48
Component Specification	19	DateField	48
Tapestry Pages	25	Delegator	49
Page State	26	Direct	49
Persistent Page State	26	ExceptionDisplay	49
EJB Page Properties	28	FieldLabel	50
Dynamic Page State	28	Foreach	50
Stale Links and the Browser Back		Form	50
Button	32	Hidden	51
Page Loading and Pooling	33	Image	51
Page Localization	34	ImageButton	51
Page Buffering	35	Insert	51
Application Engines and Services	36	InsertURL	52
Application Servlet	36	InsertWrapped	52
Required Pages	37	IntegerField	52
Server-Side State	38	Option	52
Engine Services	39	Page	52
Application Specification	40	PropertySelection	53

Radio	53	Identify Engine Services	60
RadioGroup	53	Identify Common Components	61
Rollover	54	Coding Tapestry Applications	62
Script	54	Application Engine	62
Select	54	Visit Object	62
Service	55	Enterprise JavaBeans Support	63
Shell	55	Page classes	63
Submit	55	Designing new components	64
ShowInspector	56	Choosing a base class	64
Text	56	Parameters and Bindings	65
TextField	56	Persistent Component State	66
ValidatingTextField	56	Component Assets	66
Designing Tapestry Applications	58	The Tapestry Inspector	69
Persistent Storage Strategy	58		
Identify Pages and Page Flow	59		
Identify Common Logic	59		

Introduction: What is Tapestry?

Tapestry is a comprehensive web application framework, written in Java.

Tapestry is not an application server. Tapestry is a framework designed to be used inside an application server.

Tapestry is not an application. Tapestry is a framework for creating web applications.

Tapestry is not a way of using JavaServer Pages. Tapestry is an alternative to using JavaServer Pages.

Tapestry is not a scripting environment. Tapestry uses a component object model, not simple scripting, to create highly dynamic, interactive web pages.

Tapestry is based on the Java Servlet API version 2.2. It is compatible with JDK 1.2 and above. Tapestry uses a sophisticated component model to divide a web application into a hierarchy of components. Each component has specific responsibilities for rendering web pages (that is, generating a portion of an HTML page) and responding to HTML queries (such as clicking on a link, or submitting a form).

The Tapestry framework takes on virtually all of the responsibilities for managing application flow and server-side client state. This allows developers to concentrate on the business and presentation aspects of the application.

Scripting vs. Components

Most leading web application frameworks are based on some form of scripting. These frameworks (often bundled into a web or application server) include:

- Sun JavaServer Pages
- Microsoft Active Server Pages (ASP)

- Allaire ColdFusion
- PHP
- WebMacro
- FreeMarker

All of these systems are based on reading an HTML template file and performing some kind of processing on it. The processing is identified by directives ... special tags in the HTML template that indicate dynamic behavior.

Each framework has a scripting language. For JavaServer Pages it is Java itself. For ASP it is Visual Basic. Most often, the directives are snippets of the scripting language inserted into the HTML.

For example, here's a snippet from a hypothetical JavaServer Page that displays part of a shopping cart.

```
<%  
    String userName = (String)session.getAttribute("userName");  
%>  
<h1>Contents of shopping cart for <%= userName %>:</h1>
```

Most of the text is static HTML that is sent directly back to the client web browser. The bold text identifies scripting code.

The first large block is used to extract the user name from the HttpSession, a sort of per-client scratch pad (it is part of the Java Servlet API; other systems have some similar construct). The second block is used to insert the value of an expression into the HTML. Here, the expression is simply the value of the userName variable. It could be more complex, including the result of invoking a method on a Java object.

This kind of example is often touted as showing how useful and powerful scripting solutions are. In fact, it shows the very weaknesses of scripting.

First off, we have a good bit of Java code in an HTML file. This is a problem ... no HTML editor is going to understand the JavaServer Pages syntax, or be able to validate that the Java code in the scripting sections is correct, or that it even compiles. Validation will be deferred until the page is viewed within the application. Any errors in the page will be shown as runtime errors. Having Java code here is unnatural ... Java code should be developed exclusively inside an IDE.

In a real JavaServer Pages application I've worked on, each JSP file was 30% - 50% Java. Very little of the Java was simple presentation logic like `<%= userName %>`, most of it was larger blocks needed to 'set up' the presentation logic. Another good chunk was concerned with looping through lists of results.

In an environment with separate creative and technical teams, nobody is very happy. The creative team is unlikely to know JSP or Java syntax. The technical team will have difficulty

"instrumenting" the HTML files provided by creative team. Likewise, the two teams don't have a good common language to describe their requirements for each page.

One design goal for Tapestry is minimal impact on the HTML. Many template-oriented systems add several different directives for inserting values into the HTML, marking blocks as conditional, performing repetitions and other operations. Tapestry adds exactly one directive, and it's designed to look just like an HTML element.

A Tapestry component is identified by a `<jwc>` tag (Java Web Component).

For comparison, an equivalent Tapestry template to the previous JSP example:

```
<h1>Contents of shopping basket for
<jwc id="insertUserName"/>:</h1>
```

This defines a component named `insertUserName` on the page. Because we use just a single tag, `<jwc>`, for all components, it is not possible to say exactly what dynamic content will be inserted ... that is defined elsewhere. The `<jwc>` tag simply identifies where the dynamic content will go.

A portion of the page's specification file defines what `insertUserName` is and what it does:

```
<component>
  <id>insertUserName</id>
  <type>Insert</type>

  <bindings>
    <binding>
      <name>value</name>
      <property-path>application.userName</property-path>
    </binding>
  </bindings>
</component>
```

This identifies `insertUserName` as an `Insert` component; a component that inserts some text into the response page's HTML. It further identifies what gets inserted (the component's value) as the `userName` property of the application object.

Tapestry really excels when it is doing something more complicated than simply producing output. For example, let's assume that there's a checkout button that should only be enabled when the user has items in their shopping cart.

In the JSP world, this would look something like:

```
<%
  boolean showLink;
  String imageURL;
  showLink = applicationObject.getHasCheckoutItems();
  if (showLink)
    imageURL = "/images/Checkout.gif";
  else
    imageURL = "/images/Checkout-disabled.gif";
```

```

    if (showLink)
    {
        String linkURL;
        linkURL = response.encodeURL("/servlet/checkout"); %>
<a href="<%= linkURL %>">
<% } %>
<%
    if (showLink)
        out.println("</a>");
%>

```

This assumes that *applicationObject* exists to determine whether the user has entered any checkout items. Presumably, this object was provided by a controlling servlet, or placed into the *HttpSession*.

The corresponding Tapestry HTML template is much simpler:

```
<jwc id="checkoutLink"><jwc id="checkoutButton"/></jwc>
```

A bit more goes into the component specification (a separate XML document that describes the configuration of the page and all components on the page; an excerpt is shown here):

```

<component>
  <id>checkoutLink</id>
  <type>Page</type>

  <bindings>
    <static-binding>
      <name>page</name>
      <value>Checkout</value>
    </static-binding>
    <binding>
      <name>enabled</name>
      <property-path>visit.hasCheckoutItems</property-path>
    </binding>
  </bindings>
</component>

<component>
  <id>checkoutButton</id>
  <type>Rollover</type>

  <bindings>
    <binding>
      <name>image</name>
      <property-path>assets.checkout</property-path>
    </binding>
    <binding>
      <name>disabled</name>
      <property-path>assets.checkout-disabled</property-path>
    </binding>
    <static-binding>
      <name>alt</name>
      <value>Checkout</value>
    </static-binding>
  </bindings>
</component>

```



```
</bindings>
</component>
```

Again, a bit of hand waving is necessary. Here the `checkoutLink` component creates a link to the Checkout page of the application, but only if the visit object (and object that tracks client state) enables it. The `checkoutButton` is a Rollover component, which automatically adjusts its image based on whether the link that surrounds it is enabled or disabled (it can also handle changing the image when the mouse is moved over it). We also reference the image assets, `Checkout.gif` and `Checkout-disabled.gif`, indirectly.

The point of this example is that the JSP developer had to worry about character-by-character production of HTML. Further, the ratio of Java code to HTML is quickly getting out of hand.

By contrast, the Tapestry developer is concerned with the behavior of components and has an elegant way of specifying that behavior dynamically.

Interaction

Let's continue with a portion of the JSP that would allow an item to be deleted from the shopping cart. For simplicity, we'll assume that there's an object of class `LineItem` named `item` and that there's a servlet used for making changes to the shopping cart.

```
<tr> <td> <%= item.getProductName() %></td>
      <td> <%= item.getQuantity() %></td>
      <td>
<%   String URL = response.encodeURL("/servlet/update-cart?action=remove" +
        "&item=" + item.getId());
%>
<a href="<%= URL %>">Remove</a> </td> </tr>
```

This clearly shows that in a JSP application, the designer is responsible for "knitting together" the pages, servlets and other elements at a very low level. By contrast, Tapestry takes care of nearly all these issues automatically:

```
<tr> <td> <jwc id="insertName"/> </td>
      <td> <jwc id="insertQuantity"/> </td>
      <td> <jwc id="remove">Remove</jwc> </td> </tr>
```

Because of the component object model used by Tapestry, the framework knows exactly "where on the page" the remove component is. It uses this information to build an appropriate URL that references the remove component. If the user clicks the link, the framework will inform the component to perform the desired action. The remove component can then remove the item from the shopping cart.

In fact, under Tapestry, no user code ever has to either encode or decode a URL. This removes an entire class of errors from a web application (those URLs can be harder to assemble and parse than you might think!)

Tapestry isn't merely building the URL to a servlet for you; the whole concept of 'servlets' drops out of the web application. Tapestry is building a URL that will invoke a method on a component.

Tapestry applications act like a 'super-servlet'. There's only one servlet to configure. By contrast, even a simple JavaServer Pages application developed using Sun's Model 2 (where servlets provide control logic and JSPs are used for presenting results) can easily have dozens of servlets.

Security

Developing applications using Tapestry provides some modest security benefits.

Tapestry applications are built on top of the Java Servlet API, and so inherits all the security benefits of servlets. Most security intrusions against CGI programs (such as those written in Perl or other scripting languages) rely on sloppy code that evaluates portions of the URL in a system shell; this never happens when using the Java Servlet API.

Because the URLs created by Tapestry for processing client interaction are more strongly structured than the URLs in traditional solutions, there are fewer weaknesses to exploit. Improperly formatted URLs result in an exception response being presented to the user. Tapestry URLs are also harder to spoof, since they are very conversational ... the exact form of the URL is dependent on any or all of the previous interactions between the client and the server in the same session.

Where the Java Servlet API suffers is in client identification, since a session identifier is stored on the client either as an HTTP Cookie or encoded into each URL. Malicious software could acquire such an identifier and "assume" the identity of a user who has recently logged into the application. Still, because of the conversational nature of the Tapestry URLs it would be difficult for an automated intruder to progress through the application from that point.

Finally, Tapestry applications have a single flow of control: all incoming requests flow through a few specific methods of particular classes. This makes it easier to add additional security measures that are specific to the application.

Features

The framework, based on the component object model, provides a significant number of other features, including:

- Easy localization of applications
- Extremely robust error handling and reporting
- Highly re-usable components
- Automatic persistence of server-side client state between request cycles

- Powerful processing of HTML forms
- Strong support for load balancing and fail over
- Zero code generation¹
- Easy deployment
- The Inspector, which allows developers to debug a running Tapestry application

The point of Tapestry is to free the web application developer from the most tedious tasks. In many cases, the "raw plumbing" of a web application can be completely mechanized by the framework, leaving the developer to deal with more interesting challenges, such as business and presentation logic.

As Tapestry continues to develop, new features will be added. On the drawing board are:

- Support for easy cross-browser DHTML
- Improved XML support
- WAP / WML support
- Tighter database integration
- A real-time performance "Dashboard"
- Journaling / Playback

¹ That is, Tapestry templates and specifications are interpreted as is. Unlike JSPs, they are not translated into Java classes and compiled.

Web Applications

Tapestry has a very strong sense of what an application is, derived from an XML specification file. This file identifies and gives names to all the pages in the application, and identifies certain other key classes as well. It also gives a human-readable name to the entire application.

In other systems, there is no application per-se. There is some kind of 'home page' (or servlet), which is the first page seen when a client connects to the web application. There are many pages, servlets (or equivalent, in other frameworks) and interrelations between them. There is also some amount of state stored on the server, such as the user name and a shopping cart (in a typical e-commerce application). The sum total of these elements is the web application.

Tapestry imposes a small set of constraints on the developer, chiefly, that the application be organized in terms of pages and components. These constraints are intended to be of minimal impact to the developer, imposing an acceptable amount of structure. They create a common language that can be used between members of a team, and even between the technical and creative groups within a team.

Under Tapestry a page is also very well defined: It consists of a component specification, a corresponding Java class, an HTML template, and a set of contained components.

By contrast, when using JavaServer Pages there are one or more servlets, embedded JavaBeans, a JSP file and the Java class created from the JSP file. There isn't a standard naming scheme or other way of cleanly identifying the various elements.

Interactivity in Tapestry is component based. If a component is interactive, such as an image button with a hyperlink (`<a>`), clicking on the link invokes a method on the component. All interactivity on a page is implemented by components on the page.

JavaServer Pages bases its interactivity on servlets. Interactive portions of a page must build URLs that reference these servlets. The servlets use a variety of ad-hoc methods to identify what operation is to take place when a link is clicked. Since there is no standard for any of this, different developers, even on the same project, may take widely varying approaches to implementing similar constructs.

Because pages are components, they have a well-defined interface, which describes to both the framework and the developer how the page fits into the overall application.

At the core of any Tapestry application are two objects: the *engine* and the *visit*. The engine is created when the first request from a client arrives at the server. The engine is responsible for all the mundane tasks in Tapestry, such as managing the request cycle. It is sort of a dispatcher, that handles the incoming request and runs the process of responding to the request with a new HTML page.

The visit is a second object that contains application-specific data and logic. Its type is completely defined by the application. In an e-commerce application, the visit might store a shopping cart and information about the user (once logged in).

Both the engine and the visit are stored persistently between request cycles, inside the HttpSession object.

The engine also provides services. Services are the bridge between URLs and components. Services are used to generate the URLs used by hyperlinks and form submissions. They are also responsible for interpreting the same URLs when they are later triggered from the client web browser.

Tapestry Components

Tapestry components are "black boxes" that are involved with both rendering HTML responses and responding to HTTP requests.

A Tapestry component is defined by its specification. The specification is an XML file that defines the type of the component, its parameters, the template used by the component, any components embedded within it and how they are 'wired up', and (less often) any assets used by the component.

At runtime, the specification is used to identify and instantiate a class for the component. When the page containing the component is rendered, the component will access its HTML template (whose location is defined in the specification) to find the static HTML and embedded components it will render.

Parameters and Bindings

Tapestry components are designed to work with each other, within the context of a page and application. The process of rendering a page is largely about pulling information from a source into a component and doing something with it.

For example, on a welcome page, a component might get the `userName` property from the `visit` object and insert it into the HTML response.

Each component has a specific set of parameters. Parameters have a name, a type and may be required or optional.

To developers experienced with Java GUIs, it may appear that Tapestry component parameters are the same as JavaBeans properties. This is not actually true. JavaBeans properties are set-and-forget; the designer sets a value for the property using a visual editor and the value is saved with the bean until it is used at runtime.

Parameters define the type of value needed, but not the actual value. This value is provided by a special object called a binding. The binding is responsible for providing the value for the parameter as it is needed.

A binding is a source and sink of data. A component uses a binding to import or export a data value.

There are two types of bindings: static and dynamic. Static bindings are read-only; the value for the binding is specified in the component specification.

Dynamic bindings are more prevalent and useful. A dynamic binding uses a JavaBeans property name to retrieve the value when needed by the component. The source of this data is another component.

In fact, dynamic bindings use something more powerful than just a property name, they can use a property path. A property path is a series of property names separated by periods. We've already seen an example: `visit.userName`. This is equivalent to the Java code `getVisit().getUserName()`, except that the actual class of each object is used, rather than the declared type of each method².

Property paths can be very useful, since they can allow a binding to 'crawl' deeply through an object graph to access the value it needs. This frees the components from relying totally on the properties of their container, instead they are free to access properties of more distant objects.

Let's change the example: now the `visit` object contains a `user` property, which is an object of class `User` that has a number of properties related to the real-life user (such as name, e-mail, account number, etc.).

We can still use an `Insert` component to display the user's name; we just have to extend the property path to `visit.user.name`, which is approximately equivalent to `getVisit().getUser().getName()`.

Embedded Components

Under Tapestry, it is common to define new components by combining existing components. The existing components are embedded in the containing component.

Each embedded component has an id (an identifying string) that must be unique within the containing component. Every non-page component is embedded inside some other component forming a hierarchy that can get quite deep (in real Tapestry applications, some pages have components nested three to five levels deep).

In some cases, a component will be referenced by its id path. This is a series of component ids separated by periods, representing a path from the page to a specific component. The same notation as a property path is used, but the information being represented is quite different.

For example, the id path `border.navbar.homeLink` represents the component named `homeLink`, embedded inside a component named `navbar`, embedded inside a component named `border`, embedded inside some page.

² In other words, property paths are not typesafe.

Tapestry components are "black boxes". They have a set of parameters that may be bound, but their internals, how they are implemented, is not revealed.

Primitive components may not embed other components, or even have a template. Nearly all the built-in components are primitive; they are building blocks for constructing more complex components.

Alternately, a component may be implemented using a template and embedded components. In either case, the names, types or very existence of embedded components is private, hidden inside the containing component's "black box".

HTML Templates

Nearly all Tapestry components combine static HTML³ from a template with additional dynamic content (some few components are just dynamic content). Often, a Tapestry component embeds other Tapestry components. These inner components are referenced in the containing component's template.

Templates look like standard HTML files, though they are rarely complete HTML documents; usually they are snippets. In addition, a new element, `<jwc>` (for Java Web Component), is added to represent a component in the HTML template.

The `<jwc>` element has two forms:

```
<jwc id="component id"> body </jwc>
```

or

```
<jwc id="component id"/>
```

The parser used by Tapestry is relatively forgiving about case and white space. Also, the component id can be enclosed in double quotes (as above) or single quotes.

The body listed above can be either static HTML or other Tapestry components or both. Elements in the body of a component are *wrapped* by the containing component. The containing component controls the rendering of the elements it wraps in its body. For example, the Conditional component may decide not to render its body and the Foreach component may render its body multiple times.

Not all Tapestry components should have a body. For example, the TextField component creates an `<input type=text>` form element and it makes no sense for it to contain anything else. Whether a component can have a body (and wrap other elements) is defined in the component's specification.

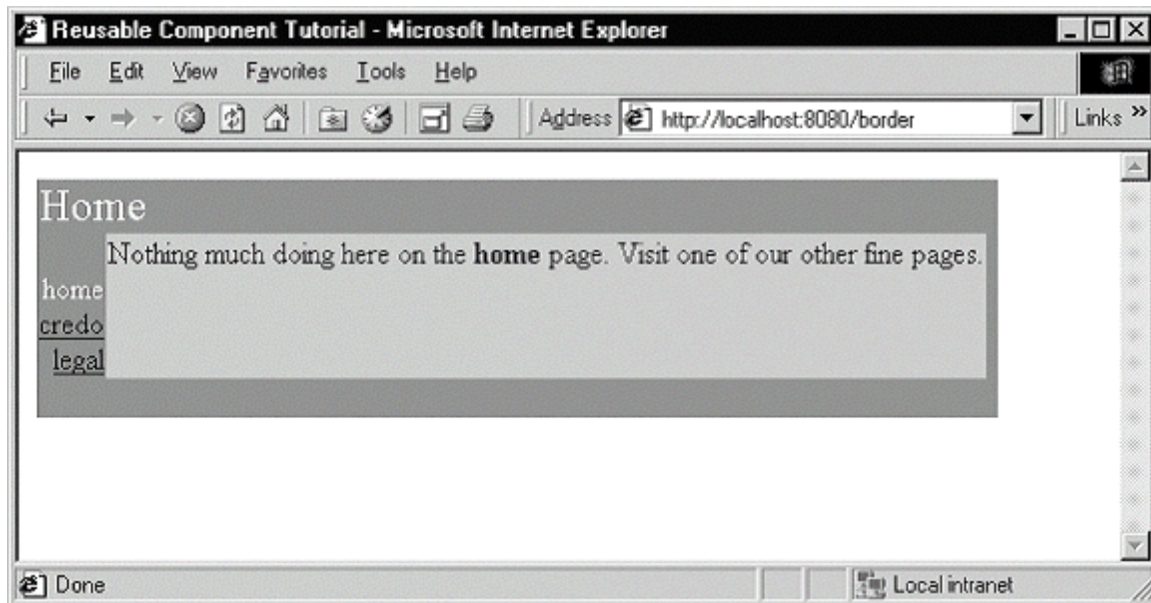
³ The initial release of Tapestry is specifically oriented around HTML. Some support for non-HTML markup languages, such as XML, XHTML or WML is already present and will be expanded in the future.

Tapestry includes a special component, `InsertWrapped`, which is used to render the body of a component. It makes it easy to create components that wrap other components.

In many scripting systems, scripting constructs are one-dimensional.... they appear at a certain point on the page and dynamically insert some content into a stream of HTML that eventually ends up on the client web browser.

Tapestry components are more powerful ... they have open and close tags and thus can contain a *body*. This body is made up of static HTML from the template and other Tapestry components. The outer component *wraps* the inner elements.

An example of this is the `Border` component in the Tapestry Tutorial⁴. It shows how a component can wrap the entire content of a page.



Here, the `border` component provides the application title ("Reusable Component Tutorial", in the title bar of the window), the page title (upper left corner) and navigation controls (left side). The page provides the content in the light gray box in the center. In this example, the page content is simply static HTML but in a real application the content would include other components.

The `Home` page component has the following HTML template:

```
<jwc id="border">

Nothing much doing here on the <b>home</b> page. Visit one of our other
fine
pages.
```

⁴ The `Border` tutorial has changed slightly since this was initially written, but the basic ideas still hold.

```
</jwc>
```

In other words, the border component gets to produce HTML first. At some point, the page's content (wrapped inside the border component) will be produced. Afterwards, the border component will have an opportunity to produce more HTML.

The Border component has a much larger HTML template:

```
<HTML>
<head>
<title>Reusable Component Tutorial</title>
</head>
<body>
<table border=0 bgcolor=gray cellpadding=0>
  <tr valign=top>
    <td colspan=3 align=left>
      <font size=5 color="White"><jwc id="insertPageTitle"/></font>
    </td>
  </tr>
  <tr valign=top>
    <td align=right>
      <font color=white>
<jwc id="e">
      <br><jwc id="link"><jwc id="insertName"/></jwc>
</jwc>
      </font>
    </td>
    <td valign=top bgcolor=silver>
      <jwc id="wrapped"/>
    </td>
    <td>&nbsp;</td>
  </tr>
  <tr>
    <td colspan=3>&nbsp;</td>
  </tr>
</table>
</body>
</HTML>
```

The Border contains five components:

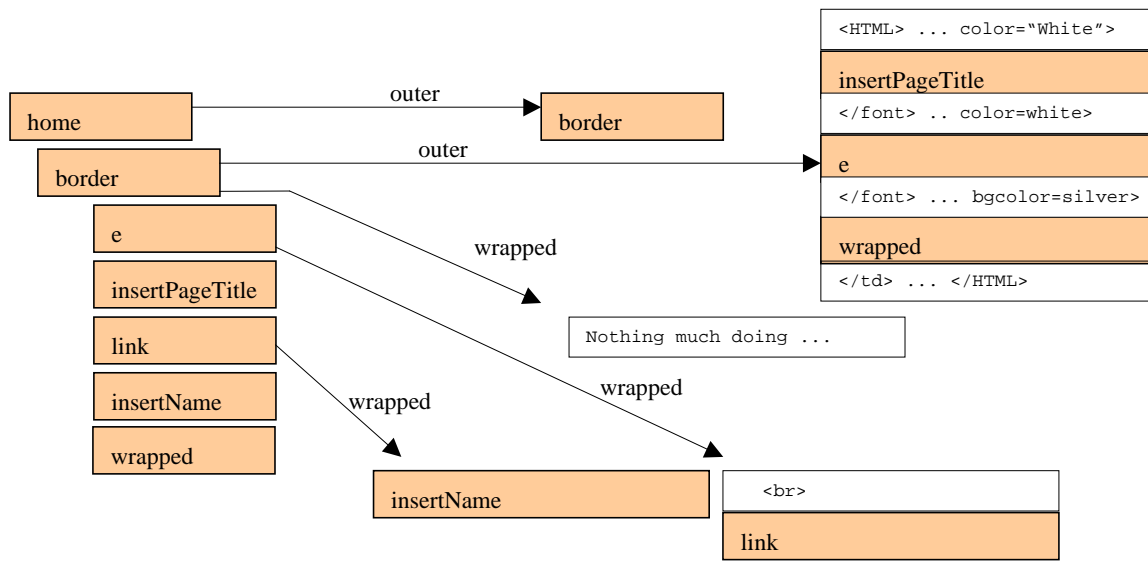
- insertPageTitle
- e
- link
- insertName
- wrapped

The e component wraps some static HTML and the link component. The link component wraps the insertName component.

When it comes time to render, Tapestry parses the HTML template and breaks them into blocks of static HTML, component starts (the `<jwc>` tag) and component ends (the `</jwc>` tag).

It figures out what each component wraps. For components with their own templates, such as Home and Border, it figures out what the *outer elements* are, the outermost static HTML and components that aren't wrapped by other components.

This information turns into a data structure:



The left side shows how the components are embedded. The home component contains the border component. The border component contains the other components.

The outermost elements for the home component is a list of one item: the border component. There's no text before or after the border component's `<jwc>` tag, and the remaining text in the template is wrapped by the border component.

The border component is more complicated; it has several outer elements, representing static HTML text and components. The other components don't have templates, so they don't have outer elements, but some do wrap other components.

When it's time to render, the process starts in the home component. It iterates through its outer list, which contains a single element: border. We then recursively render the border component. Its outer list is rendered in order. Each component decides where it will render its wrapped elements (if it has any). The e component is a Foreach; it will render its wrapped elements any number of times.

Eventually, the process reaches the wrapped component, which is of type `InsertWrapped`. This is a special component; it jumps up one level to its container (the border) and renders the border's wrapped elements ... the text from the home page template.

It may seem complicated, but ultimately its very natural from a markup language point of view; the `<jwc>` tags continue to act like HTML elements, wrapping around and controlling their contents, just exactly like a `<table>` wraps its `<tr>`'s or a `<form>` wraps its `<input>`'s.

Localization

Tapestry has built in support for localization, designed to be easy to use. Tapestry allows multiple versions of HTML templates and assets (described in a later section) to be deployed with the application.

Each client connecting to the application will select a particular Locale. When a page for the application is created, the locale is used to select the correct template. Locales are defined by the ISO (International Standards Organization). A locale consists of a language code (such as 'en' for English, 'de' for German or 'fr' for French) and a country code (such as 'AU' for Australia, 'BE' for Belgium, or 'GB' for United Kingdom).

The base template name is derived from the specification name, by changing the '.jwc' extension to '.html'. For example, component `/com/skunkworx/skunkapp/Banner.jwc` will have a base template name of `/com/skunkworx/skunkapp/Banner.html`. This resource name is used as the basis of a search that includes the locale. Various suffixes are inserted just before the '.html' extension. A French speaking Belgian visitor would provoke the following search:

- `/com/skunkworx/skunkapp/Banner_fr_BE.html`
- `/com/skunkworx/skunkapp/Banner_fr.html`
- `/com/skunkworx/skunkapp/Banner.html`

The Tapestry framework automatically provides this basic level of support. To this, an application could add custom logic to allow the locale to be selected at runtime, and to store a user's locale preference (in a cookie, or in some form of profile) for later visits.

As of this writing, localization has not been implemented. However, support for localization is in all necessary interfaces.

Assets

Assets are images (GIF, JPEG, etc.), movies, sounds or other collateral associated with a web application. Assets come in three flavors: external, internal and private.

External assets live at an arbitrary URL. Internal assets use a URL within the servlet context hosting the Tapestry application; these assets are deployed on the same web server as the application, or within the same Web Application Archive (WAR).

Private assets come from the Java class path and are resources not normally visible to the web server.

Tapestry uses the assets concept to address two areas: localization and deployment.

For localization: internal and private assets are localized, just like HTML templates. That is, the path name provided is used as the basis for a search that takes into account the containing page's locale. External assets can't be localized in this way.

Private assets allow for easy deployment because the assets are packaged with the HTML templates and Java code of the application, inside a Java Archive (JAR) file, or within the `WEB-INF/classes` directory of a Web Application Archive (WAR) file.

Private assets support re-usability; a re-usable component may be packaged with supporting assets (typically, image files) and used in any Tapestry application without change, and without having to locate, extract or otherwise fiddle with those assets.

The Tapestry framework provides two ways of exposing the assets to the client web browser.

First, it provides a service that will access the asset dynamically. The URL encodes the application servlet and the resource to download, and Tapestry framework code will pump the bytes down to the client web browser. This is the default behavior (and is most useful during development).

The second method involves copying the asset out to a directory visible to the web server, and creating a URL for it in its final location. This requires some extra configuration of the application. This method also has some implications when deploying new versions of the web application. These are addressed later in this document.

Component Specification

The component specification is an XML document. This discussion assumes a passing familiarity with XML documents. The specification is located inside the running Java VMs class path; in a deployed application, it will be a package resource, located (along with the Java class files) in the `WEB-INF/classes` directory of the WAR (Web Application Archive).

These specifications can be quite verbose, it is strongly advised that a DTD-aware XML editor be used, rather than hand editing the files.

The specification begins as follows:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE specification PUBLIC
    "-//Primix Solutions//Tapestry Specification 1.0//EN"
    "http://tapestry.sourceforge.net/dtd/Tapestry_1_0.dtd">

<specification>
```

This begins the XML document, and identifies it as a component specification.

Next, the type of the component, the Java class to instantiate, is defined.

```
<class>class name</class>
```

This must be a full class name, such as `com.skunkworx.skunkapp.Border`.

As previously described, the specification name is used to find the base HTML template name (by replacing the '.jwc' extension with '.html').

During development, such resources may be in the developer's work areas, but when the application is deployed, they will almost always be distributed inside a Java Archive (JAR) file or Web Application Archive (WAR) file. This is one of the ways that Tapestry eases deployment.

Next, the specification describes whether the component can have a body (that is, wrap around other HTML or components).

This is specified using the `<allow-body>` element:

```
<allow-body>boolean</allow-body>
```

The value specified should be "true" or "false". If not specified (the usual case), it defaults to true, allowing the component to have a body.

The next section describes the parameters to the component, all of which is specified inside a `<parameters>` element. Components can have two types of parameters: formal and informal. Formal parameters describe the interface to the component and have already been touched on.

Informal parameters are a kind of 'back door' to the HTML generated by the component. The majority of components have a one-to-one relationship to an HTML element.

Each informal parameter will be converted to an attribute / value pair and added to the HTML element. The component will silently filter out any informal parameters whose name conflicts with either a formal parameter name or an attribute controlled by the component. For example, the action component (which generates an `<a>` element) will not allow an informal parameter to specify the "href" attribute. Note that the check is case insensitive, so an informal parameter of "Href" would also be skipped.

Informal parameters are primarily used to set the "class" attribute (used in conjunction with cascading style sheets) and to create JavaScript event handlers.

Some components do not have the necessary one-to-one mapping to an HTML element that makes informal parameters useful. The `<allow-informal-parameters>` element controls this:

```
<parameters>
  <allow-informal-parameters>boolean
</allow-informal-parameters>
```

By default, informal parameters are allowed, so this is used to turn them off. This element is optional, and usually omitted.

Following this, each parameter is specified with a `<parameter>` element:

```
<parameter>
  <name>string</name>
  <java-type>class name</java-type>
  <required>boolean</required>
</parameter>
```

Each parameter must have a unique name. Parameter names must start with a letter and may contain letters, numbers and the underscore.

The Java type is the complete class name of a Java class that represents the type of data required (or provided) by the component. If not specified, it defaults to `java.lang.Object`.

If a parameter is required, then a binding must be provided for the parameter when it is embedded in another component. The `<required>` element is optional, and defaults to `false` (meaning the parameter is optional).

Once all formal parameters are defined, the parameters element is closed:

```
</parameters>
```

Following the parameters, embedded components are detailed. A `<components>` element surrounds a list of `<component>` elements.

A `<component>` tag starts each component:

```
<component>
  <id>component id</id>
  <type>component type</type>
```

Each component has a short id, which must be unique within its containing component. This id is used to match the component against a `<jwc>` tag in the HTML template.

Each component must also have a type. Types are resource paths for a component specification. Specifications end with `'.jwc'`. An example would be `/com/skunkworx/skunkapp/Banner.jwc`.

Unlike HTML templates, specifications are never localized.

As a convenience, aliases may be defined for components. An alias is a short name that takes the place of the specification resource path. All built-in components for Tapestry have aliases, and an application specification may define additional aliases.

For example, the component `/com/primix/tapestry/components/Action.jwc` has a standard alias of `Action`.

Most components have parameters, and therefore, bindings. Bindings are contained within a `<bindings>` element.

```
<bindings>
```

There are four different elements to specify bindings.

The `<binding>` element specifies a dynamic binding for the parameter.

```
<binding>
  <name>parameter name</name>
  <property-path>property path</property-path>
</binding>
```

The property path is specified relative to the containing component.

In some cases, the value for the parameter will never change; in this case a `<static-binding>` is used:

```
<static-binding>
  <name>parameter name</name>
  <value>value</value>
</static-binding>
```

Obviously, this only works for parameters that expect Strings or can coerce a String to a useful value (such as a boolean or int). Static bindings also work quite well with informal parameters.

The third type of binding allows a parameter to be set from a public static field:

```
<field-binding>
  <name>parameter name</name>
  <field-name>field name</field-name>
</field-binding>
```

The field name is the complete name of a class, followed by a period, and then the name of a public, static (usually final) field. For example, the value `com.primix.tapestry.IApplicationService.HOME_SERVICE` references the public static String variable, `HOME_SERVICE` contained within the interface `IApplicationService`.

This is both more precise and more efficient than a static binding. In many cases, it ensures that the component and the related Java code agree on the exact value, rather than approximating the value with a String. In addition, the value can be any data type, both scalars (such as int or double) or real object types.

Because certain values in the `java.lang` package are so useful, a classname without a package is assumed to be in the `java.lang` package. Thus the value `Boolean.TRUE` is an acceptable field name.

Finally, in some cases, it makes sense for an embedded component to share a binding with its container. This is accomplished with the `<inherited-binding>` element:

```
<inherited-binding>
  <name>parameter name</name>
  <parameter-name>parameter name</parameter-name>
</inherited-binding>
```


In this case, the first parameter name is the name of a parameter of the embedded component. The second parameter name is the name of a parameter of the containing component.

An example of this is a Border component, which has a title parameter that gives the name of the page. The Border component embeds an Insert component, and uses an inherited binding to set the Insert component's value parameter to the containing Border component's title parameter.

Once all bindings for a component are specified, the `<bindings>` and `<component>` elements are closed.

```
</bindings>
</component>
```

Additional components may be specified within their own `<component>` elements. Once all components are specified, the `<components>` element is closed.

```
</components>
```

Next, any assets for the component are specified. Assets are a way of identifying resources whose URLs will appear in a web page. Most often, the assets are image files used with an Image or Rollover component.

Assets may be stored at some arbitrary URL, may be somewhere on the same web site as the Tapestry application, or may be stored as a resource inside Java VM class path.

Assets are contained within an `<assets>` element.

```
<assets>
```

There are three types of elements for specifying assets:

```
<external-asset>
  <name>name</name>
  <URL>URL</URL>
</external-asset>

<internal-asset>
  <name>name</name>
  <path>path</path>
</internal-asset>

<private-asset>
  <name>name</name>
  <resource-path>resource path</resource-path>
</private-asset>
```

In all three cases, the name must be very simple: start with a letter and contain only letters, numbers and underscores. Assets names must be unique within the component.

For external assets, the URL must be complete: it will generally be inserted into the HTML unchanged.

For internal assets, the path must be relative to the web server's root directory. Internal assets may be localized; this will be reflected in the actual file chosen and in the URL inserted into the HTML.

For private assets, the resource path must be a resource path within the Java VM class path, like a specification or HTML template resource path. This means the image can be stored in the applications JAR, or in the `WEB-INF/classes` directory of the application's WAR, or inside some JAR in the class path.

Internal and private assets may be localized: Tapestry will perform a search similar to the one for HTML templates to locate the best match.

Once all assets have been specified, the `<assets>` element is closed:

```
</assets>
```

Since that's the last element in a component specification, the specification itself is closed:

```
</specification>
```

The major tags, `<parameters>`, `<components>`, `<bindings>` and `<assets>` are only specified if there are elements to be contained. A component with no components will not have a `<components>` element. An embedded component with no bindings will not have a `<bindings>` element. In many cases, a component specification will be only a few lines long.

Tapestry Pages

Pages are specialized versions of components. As components, they have a specification, embedded components, assets and an HTML template.

Pages do not have parameters, because they are the outermost component in the component hierarchy.

All components, however deep their nesting, have a page property that points back to the page they are ultimately embedded within. Pages have an engine property that points to the engine they are currently attached to.

Pages participate in a pooling mechanism, so that a single instance of a page component can be used by multiple sessions of the same web application. Even when a large number of client sessions are active, it is rare for more than a handful to be actively processing requests in the application server. This pooling mechanism minimizes the number of instances of a page that must exist concurrently on the server. There are some implications to this design that are discussed in the following sections.

Pages may have persistent state, properties that persist between request cycles. In fact, any component may have persistent state, and use the page as means for recording that state.

The engine is a session persistent object. The implementation of this varies from application server to application server, but the basic idea is that the `HttpSession` is serialized after each request and stored in a file or database. It may then be removed from memory. When a subsequent request for the same session arrives, it is restored from the persistent storage.

In a clustering server application, consecutive requests for the same session may be serviced by different servers within the cluster. Serializing and deserializing the `HttpSession` is the mechanism by which the servers are kept synchronized.

The visit object is a property of the engine object, so it is serialized and de-serialized with the engine.

Pages are *not* session persistent. They exist only within the memory of the Java VM in which they are first created. Pages and components don't need to implement the `java.io.Serializable` interface; they will never be serialized.

The application engine can always instantiate a new page instance and restore its previously recorded state (the recorded state information is serialized with the engine).

Page State

Pages, and the components on them, have *state*. State is considered the set of values for the properties of the page.

In Tapestry, the lifespan of each property is very important. There are three lifespans:

- **Persistent.** Changes the property are recorded and persist between request cycles. Persistent properties are restored when the page is next loaded.
- **Transient.** The property is set before the page is rendered and will be reset (to default value) when the page is next loaded.
- **Dynamic.** The property changes *while the page is rendered*, but (like transient) the property is reset when the page is next loaded.

Persistent properties are things like the user's name, the product being displayed in an e-commerce application, etc. Transient properties are more commonly things needed just once, such as an error message. Dynamic properties are intimately tied to the rendering process ... for example, to display a list of items in an order, it may be necessary to have a dynamic property take the value of each line item in sequence, as part of a loop.

Persistent Page State

The Tapestry framework is responsible for tracking changes to page state during the request cycle, and storing that state between request cycles. Ultimately, this is the responsibility of the application engine. This is accomplished through page recorder objects. As a page's persistent state changes, it notifies its page recorder, providing the name of the property and the new value. This information is stored persistently between request cycles. In a later request cycle, the page recorder combines this information with a page instance to rollback the state of the page.

Pages are blind as to how their state is stored. The basic implementation of Tapestry simply stores the page state information in memory (and serializes it with the engine, in the HttpSession), but future options may include storing the data in flat files, relational databases or even as cookies in the client browser.

Some minor burden is placed on the page designer to support persistent state.

The mutator method of every persistent property must include a line of code that notifies the observer of the change.

For example, consider a page that has a persistent property for storing an email address. It would implement the normal accessor and mutator methods:

```
private String emailAddress;

public String getEmailAddress()
{
    return emailAddress;
}

public void setEmailAddress(String value)
{
    emailAddress = value;

    fireObservedChange("emailAddress", value);
}
```

The mutator method does slightly more than change the private instance variable; it must also notify the observer of the change, by invoking the method `fireObservedChange()`, which is implemented by the class `com.primix.tapestry.AbstractComponent`. This method is overloaded ... implementations are provided for every type of scalar value, and for `java.lang.Object`.

The value itself must be serializable (scalar values are converted to wrapper classes, which are serializable).

The page designer must provide some additional code to manage the lifecycle of the page and its persistent properties. This is necessary to support the "shell game" that allows a page instance to be separate from its persistent state, and is best explained by example. Let's pretend that the user can select a personal preference for the color scheme of a page. The default color is blue.

The first user, Suzanne, reaches the page first. Disliking the blue color scheme, she uses a form on the page to select a green color scheme. The instance variable of the page is changed to green, and the page recorder inside Suzanne's session records that the persistent value for the color property is green.

When Suzanne revisits the page, an arbitrary instance of the page is taken from the pool. The page recorder changes the color of the page to green and Suzanne sees a green page.

However, if Nancy visits the same page for the first time, what is the color? Her page recorder will not note any particular selection for the page color property. She'll get whatever was left in the page's instance variable ... green if she gets the instance last used to display the page for Suzanne, or some other color if some other user recently hit the same page.

This may seem relatively minor when the persistent page state is just the background color. However, in a real application the persistent page state information may include user login information, credit card data, the contents of a shopping cart or whatever.

The way to deal with this properly is for each page with persistent state to override the method `detach()`. The implementation should reset any instance variables on the page to their initial (freshly allocated) values.

In our example, when Suzanne is done with the page, its `detach()` method will reset the page color property back to blue before releasing it into the pool. When Nancy hits the page for the first time, the page retrieved from the pool will have the expected blue property.

In our earlier email address example, the following additional code must be implemented by the page:

```
public void detach()
{
    emailAddress = null;

    super.detach();
}
```

All properties, dynamic, transient and persistent, should be reset inside the `detach()` method.

Individual components on a page may also have dynamic, transient or persistent properties. If so, they should implement the `ILifecycle` interface and implement the `reset()` method and clear out such properties, as a page does in `detach()`.

EJB Page Properties

Tapestry makes a single, special case for one particular type of persistent page property: references to Enterprise JavaBeans.

The page recorders check to see if a page property is type `javax.ejb.EJBObject`. If so, they don't store the object itself (EJBObjects are not serializable), instead they get the Handle for the object and store that instead (Handles are serializable).

When the page is next accessed, the Handle is converted back into an `EJBObject` before assigning it to the page property.

A side effect of this is that you may not have a Handle as a persistent page property; the page recorders don't have a way to differentiate a Handle from an `EJBObject` converted to a Handle and always assume the latter.

Dynamic Page State

The properties of a page and components on the page can change during the rendering process. These are changes to the page's dynamic state.

The majority of components in an application use their bindings to pull data from the page (or from business objects reachable from the page).

A small number of components, notably the `Foreach` component, work the other way; pushing data back to the page (or some other component).

The Foreach component is used to loop over a set of items. It has one parameter from which it reads the list of items. A second parameter is used to write each item back to a property of its container.

For example, in our shopping cart example, we may use a Foreach to run through the list of line items in the shopping cart. Each line item identifies the product, cost and quantity.

```
Shopping cart for <jwc id="insertUserName"/>
<table>
  <tr> <th>Product</th> <th>Qty</th> <th>Price</th> </tr>
  <jwc id="e-item">
    <tr>
      <td> <jwc id="insertProductName"/> </td>
      <td> <jwc id="insertQuantity"/> </td>
      <td> <jwc id="insertPrice"/> </td>
      <td> <jwc id="remove">remove</jwc> </td>
    </tr>
  </jwc>
</table>
```

(Obviously, we've glossed over many details, such as allowing the quantity to be updated, and showing subtotals).

Component e-item is our Foreach. It will render its body several times, depending on the number of line items in the cart. On each pass it:

- Gets the next value from the source
- Updates the value into some property of its container
- Renders its body (the static HTML and components it wraps)

This continues until there are no more values in its source. Lets say this is a page that has a `lineItem` property that is being updated by the e-item component. The `insertProductName`, `insertQuantity` and `insertPrice` components use dynamic bindings such as `lineItem.productName`, `lineItem.quantity` and `lineItem.price`.

Part of the page's specification would configure these embedded components:

```
<component>
  <id>e-item</id>
  <type>Foreach</type>

  <bindings>
    <binding>
      <name>source</name>
      <property-path>items</property-path>
    </binding>

    <binding>
      <name>value</name>
      <property-path>lineItem</property-path>
```

```

    </binding>
  </bindings>
</component>

<component>
  <id>insertProductName</id>
  <type>Insert</type>

  <bindings>
    <binding>
      <name>value</name>
      <property-path>lineItem.productName</property-path>
    </binding>
  </bindings>
</component>

<component>
  <id>insertQuantity</id>
  <type>Insert</type>

  <bindings>
    <binding>
      <name>value</name>
      <property-path>lineItem.quantity</property-path>
    </binding>
  </bindings>
</component>

<component>
  <id>insertPrice</id>
  <type>Insert</type>

  <bindings>
    <binding>
      <name>value</name>
      <property-path>lineItem.price</property-path>
    </binding>
  </bindings>
</component>

<component>
  <name>remove</name>
  <type>Action</type>

  <bindings>
    <binding>
      <name>listener</name>
      <property-path>removeListener</property-path>
    </binding>
  </bindings>
</component>

```

This is very important to the remove component. On some future request cycle, it will be expected to remove a specific line item from the shopping cart, but how will it know which one?

This is at the heart of the action service. One aspect of the `IRequestCycle`'s functionality is to dole out a sequence of action ids that are used for this purpose (they are also involved in forms and form elements). As the Action component renders itself, it allocates the next action id from the request cycle. Regardless of what path through the page's component hierarchy the rendering takes, the numbers are doled out in sequence. This includes conditional blocks and loops such as the `Foreach`.

The steps taken to render an HTML response are very deterministic. If it were possible to 'rewind the clock' and restore all the involved objects back to the same state (the same values for their instance variables) that they were just before the rendering took place, the end result would be the same. The exact same HTML response would be created.

This is similar to the way in which compiling a program for source code results in the same object code. Because the inputs are the same, the results will be identical.

This fact is exploited by the action service to respond to the URL. In fact, the state of the page and components is rolled back and the rendering processes fired again (with output discarded). Code inside the Action component can compare the action id against the target action id encoded within the URL. When a match is found, the Action component can count on the state of the page and all components on the page to be in the exact same state they were in when the page was previously rendered.

A small effort is required of the developer to always ensure that this rewind operation works. In cases where this can't be guaranteed (for instance, if the source of this dynamic data is a stock ticker or unpredictable database query) then other options must be used.

In our example, the remove component would trigger some application specific code implemented in its containing page that removes the current `lineItem` from the shopping cart.

The application is responsible for providing a *listener*, an object that is notified when the Action component is triggered. Action listeners implement the `IActionListener` interface, which has a single method, `actionTriggered()`.

Typically, the accessor method that provides the listener returns an instance of an inner class. Since our specification identified `removeListener` as the listener property for the remove component, the page must implement a `removeListener` property:

```
public IActionListener getRemoveListener()
{
    return new IActionListener()
    {
        public void actionTriggered(IComponent component,
            IRequestCycle cycle)
            throws RequestCycleException
        {
            getCart().remove(lineItem);
        }
    };
}
```

This method is only invoked after all the page state is rewound; especially relevant is the `lineItem` property. The listener gets the shopping cart and removes the current line item from it. This whole rewinding process has ensured that `lineItem` is the correct value, even though the `remove` component was rendered several times on the page (because it was wrapped by the `Foreach` component).

An equivalent JavaServer Pages application would have needed to define a servlet for removing items from the cart, and would have had to encode in the URL some identifier for the item to be removed. The servlet would have to pick apart the URL to find the cart item identifier, locate the `ShoppingCart` (probably stored in the `HttpSession`) and the particular `CartItem` and invoke the `remove()` method directly. Finally, it would forward to the JSP that would produce the updated page.

The page containing the shopping cart would need to have special knowledge of the cart modifying servlet; its servlet prefix and the structure of the URL (that is, how the item to remove is identified). This creates a tight coupling between any page that wants to display the shopping cart and the servlet used to modify the shopping cart. If the shopping cart servlet is modified such that the URL it expects changes structure, all pages referencing the servlet will be broken.

Tapestry eliminates all of these issues, reducing the issue of manipulating the shopping cart down to the listener class, and its single, small method.

Stale Links and the Browser Back Button

The fact that web browsers have a "back" button is infuriating to application developers. What right does the user have to dictate the order of navigation through the application? Who's application is this anyway?

In a truly stateless application, the browser back button is not a great hardship, because each page carries within itself (as cookies, hidden form fields and encoded URLs) all the state necessary to process the page.

Tapestry applications can be more stateful, which is a blessing and a curse. The blessing is that the Tapestry application, running on the server, can maintain state in terms of business objects, data from databases, Enterprise JavaBeans and more. The curse is that a user hitting the back button on the browser loses synchronization with that state.

Let's use an e-commerce example. A user is browsing a list of available cameras from a product catalog. The user clicks on a Minolta camera and is presented with pictures, prices and details about the Minolta camera.

Part of the page lists similar or related items. The user clicks on the name of a similar Nikon camera and is shown the pictures, prices and details of the Nikon camera. The user then hits the browser back button, returning to the (out of date) page showing the Minolta camera, and clicks the "add to shopping cart" button.

The user is sent to the shopping cart page, but what has been added to the cart, the Minolta or the Nikon? It depends on how the Tapestry application has been structured.

Presumably, the application has a single page, named "ProductDetails", that shows the pictures, prices and details of any product. The product details page will have a persistent property named `product`, of type `Product`. `Product` is a business class that contains all that pricing and detail information.

The question is, how is the add to shopping link implemented? If its logic is to add whatever the current value of the `product` property is (i.e., an `Action` component or part of a form) then it will add the Nikon camera, since that's the current product. This is the naïve approach, since it doesn't take into account the possibility that the user worked backwards to a prior page.

On the other hand, if a `Direct` component is used, it can encode into the URL the primary key of the Minolta product, and that will be the product added to the shopping cart, regardless of the current value of the `product` property.

Forms, controlled by the `Form` component, must make use of the action service, and so they are susceptible to these issues related to the browser back button. Still, there are techniques to make even forms safe. Borrowing an idea from more traditional JavaServer Pages development, a hidden field can be included in the form to synchronize the form and the application ... for example, including the primary key of the Minolta or Nikon product. Tapestry includes a `Hidden` component used for just this purpose.

Page Loading and Pooling

The process of loading a page (instantiating the page and its components) can be somewhat expensive. It involves reading the page's specification as well as the specification of all embedded components within the page. It also involves locating, reading and parsing the HTML templates of all components. Component bindings must be created and assigned.

All of this takes time ... not much time on an unloaded server but potentially longer than is acceptable on a busy site.

It would certainly be wasteful to create these pages just to discard them at the end of the request cycle.

Instead, pages are used during a request cycle, and then stored in a pool for later re-use. In practice, this means that a relatively small number of page objects can be shared, even when there are a large number of clients (a single pool is shared by all clients). The maximum number of instances of any one page is determined by the maximum number of clients that simultaneously process a request that involves that page.

A page is taken out of the pool only long enough to process a request for a client that involves it. A page is involved in a request if it contains the component identified in the service URL, or if application code involves the page explicitly (for instance, uses the page to render the HTML

response). In either case, as soon as the response HTML stream is sent back to the client, any pages used during the request cycle are released back to the pool.

This means that pages are out of the pool only for short periods of time. The duration of any single request should be very short, a matter of a second or two. If, during that window, a second request arrives (from a different client) that involves the same page, a new instance will be created. Unless and until that happens, a single instance will be used and re-used by all clients, regardless of the number of clients.

The current version of Tapestry never clears out the page pool; this potentially means that a sudden glut of requests may create a large number of pages that may later not be used. This will be addressed in future versions of the framework.

Page Localization

When a page is first created, its locale is set to match the locale of the application it is loaded into. This page locale is read-only; it is set when the page is first created and never changes.

Any component or asset on the page that needs to be locale-specific (for instance, to load the correct HTML template) will reference the page's locale.

As noted previously, pages are not discarded; they are pooled for later reuse. When an application gets an existing page from the pool, it always matches its locale against the pooled page's locale. Thus a page and its application will always agree on locale, with one exception: if the application locale is changed during the request cycle.

When the application locale changes, any pages loaded in the current request cycle will reflect the prior locale. On subsequent request cycles, new pages will be loaded (or retrieved from the pool) with locales matching the application's new locale.

Tapestry does not currently have a mechanism for unloading a page in the same request cycle it was loaded (except at the end of the request cycle, when all pages are returned to the pool). If an application includes the ability to change locale, it should change to a new page after the locale change occurs.

Changing locale may have other, odd effects. If part of a page's persistent state is localized and the application locale is changed, then on a subsequent request cycle, the old localized state will be loaded into the new page (with the new locale). This may also affect any components on the page that have persistent state (though components with persistent state are quite rare).

In general, however, page localization is as easy as component localization and is usually not much of a consideration when designing web applications with Tapestry.

Page Buffering

The HTML response generated by a page during rendering is buffered. Eight kilobytes of 8-bit ASCII HTML is allowed to accumulate before any HTML output is actually sent back to the client web browser.

If a Java exception is thrown during the page rendering process, any buffered output is discarded, and the application-defined exception page is used to report the exception.

If a page generates a large amount of HTML and then throws an exception, the exception page is still used to report the exception, however the page finally viewed in the client browser will be "ugly", because part of the failed page's HTML will appear, then the complete HTML of the exception page.

In practice, virtually all Tapestry pages will use a Body component, and a Body component buffers the output of all components it wraps. This buffering is necessary so that the Body component can write out various JavaScript handlers before the main body of HTML is written (this is often related to the use of the Rollover component). In any case, whenever a Body component is used, and exception thrown during the rendering of the page will cause all the HTML buffered by the Body component to be cleanly discarded, allowing for a clean presentation of the exception page.

There is a second aspect to page buffering; related to the HTTP protocol itself. An important optimization is the 'Keep Alive' session. When possible, one connection between a web browser and a web server should be used for multiple requests ... for example, to get a web page and then get all the images on the web page. Early web browsers and clients didn't support this behavior, so each request required opening a new connection to the server. All modern web browsers and servers will take advantage of Keep Alive sessions ... if possible.

For sessions to be kept alive, each request and response must identify the exact length of its content, in bytes, before transferring the content. For static web pages and static images, this is quite normal; the web browser simply looks up the size of the page or image before transferring its contents as a byte stream.

Dynamic web sites are different because, by their very nature, the number of bytes is not known when the first byte is written. For the server to indicate the end of the document to the client web browser, it must close the connection.

This is overcome by page buffering, where the first byte isn't written until the buffer is filled or the complete HTML response assembled in memory. If the entire HTML response is in the in-memory buffer before any of the response is returned to the client web browser, then the exact number of bytes will be known, just like a static page.

Application Engines and Services

The application engine is a central object whose responsibility is to run the request cycle for each request. To do this, it manages resources such as page loaders and page recorders and provides services to the pages and components utilized during the request cycle.

Application engines are instantiated by the application's servlet (described in the next section). They are stored into the `HttpSession` and are persistent between request cycles.

An important of the engine is to provide named *engine services*, which are used to create and respond to URLs. The application engine creates and manages the request cycle and provides robust default behavior for catching and reporting exceptions.

The application engine provides the page recorder objects used by the request cycle. By doing so, it sets the persistence strategy for the application as a whole. For example, applications which use or subclass `com.primix.tapestry.engine.SimpleEngine` will use the simple method of storing persistent state: in memory. Such applications may still be distributed, since the page recorders will be serialized with the application engine (which is stored within the `HttpSession`).

Application Servlet

An application has a servlet, which acts as a bridge between the servlet container and the application engine. The application servlet is a subclass of `com.primix.tapestry.ApplicationServlet`.

The subclass provides the framework with the path to the application specification by implementing the `getApplicationSpecificationPath()` method.

The servlet may also perform some static initialization for the application in its `init()` method. This includes tasks such as loading JDBC drivers.

In some cases, the application is dependent on some context initialization parameters (the context is the container of the servlet, and is usually mapped to a single web application).

Context initial parameter name	Description
com.primix.tapestry.asset.dir	The complete pathname of a directory to which private assets may be copied by the asset externalizer.
com.primix.tapestry.asset.URL	The URL corresponding to the external asset directory.

These two parameters are used to allow efficient access to internal assets, by copying them out of the classpath and to a directory visible to the web server.

Required Pages

Each application is required to have a minimum of five pages with specific names. Tapestry provides default implementations for four of the five, but a full-featured Tapestry application may override any of the other three to provide a consistent look-and-feel.

Page Name	Required	Description
Exception	Default provided, may be changed.	Page used to present uncaught exceptions to the user.
Home	Must be provided by developer	The initial page displayed when the application is started.
Inspector	Provided, never overridden.	Inspector that allows the Tapestry application to be interrogated on its structure.
StaleSession	Default provided, may be changed.	Page used to announce that the session is invalid.
StateLink	Default provided, may be changed.	Page used to announce that an stale link (see below) was triggered.

Tapestry only mandates the logical name of these four pages; the actual page component used is defined in the application specification.

The Home page is the first page viewed by a client connecting to the application. Other than that, there is nothing special about the home page.

The initial connection to the application, where nothing is specified in the URL but the path to the servlet, causes the home service to be invoked, which makes use of the home page.

The restart service will also redirect the user to the home page.

No default is provided for the Home page; every Tapestry application must define a Home page.

The Exception page is invoked whenever an exception is thrown when processing a service.

The Tapestry framework catches the exception and discards any HTML output (this is why output is buffered in memory).

The Exception page must implement a writable JavaBeans property of type `java.lang.Throwable` named `exception`. The framework will invoke the accessor method before the page is rendered.

The class `com.primix.foundation.exception.ExceptionAnalyzer` and the `ExceptionDisplay` component are typically used to present this information.

The `StaleLink` page is displayed when a `com.primix.tapestry.StaleLinkException` is thrown, which may occur during the processing of the request. The exception is thrown when Tapestry determines that the state of the page (on the server) is out of synch with the client's view of the page ... this most often happens when the user makes use of the browser's back button.

The default implementation informs the user of the problem ("you really shouldn't use the back button on your browser") and uses the home service to create a link back to the home page.

The `StaleSession` page is displayed when a `com.primix.tapestry.StaleSessionException` is thrown. This exception is thrown from the action and direct services if the `HttpSession` is newly created - this indicates a fresh connection to the servlet container after the old session timed out and was discarded.

Note that the home, restart and page services do not check for a newly created session.

The `Inspector` page is provided by the framework; it allows a developer to interrogate a running Tapestry application to determine its structure.

Server-Side State

There are two types of server side state that are supported by Tapestry: persistent page properties and the visit object. The first (page properties) have already been discussed.

The visit object is a central repository for application state and presentation logic. The visit object is accessible through the application engine (the engine implements a visit property).

The application engine doesn't care about the class of the visit object, or what properties it implements.

The visit object holds central information that is needed by many pages. For example, an e-commerce application may store the shopping cart as a property of the visit object.

When using Enterprise JavaBeans, the visit object is a good place to store remote object references (centralizing the logic to look up home interfaces, instantiate references, etc.).

Every page implements a visit property that allows access to the visit object.

When using the `com.primix.tapestry.engine.SimpleEngine` engine, the visit object is created the first time it is referenced. The class of the visit object is stored in the application specification.

Engine Services

Engine services provide the structure for building a web application from individual pages and components.

Each engine service has a unique name. Well known names exist for the basic services (page, action, direct, etc., described in a later section).

Engine services are responsible for creating URLs (which are inserted into the response HTML) and for later responding to those same URLs. This keeps the meaning of URLs localized. In a typical servlet or JSP application, code in one place creates the URL for some servlet to interpret. The servlet is in a completely different section of code. In situations where the servlet's behavior is extended, it may be necessary to change the structure of the URL the servlet processes ... and this requires finding every location such a URL is constructed and fixing it. This is the kind of inflexible, ad-hoc, buggy solution Tapestry is designed to eliminate.

Most services have a relationship to a particular component. The basic services (action, direct, page) each have a corresponding component (Action, Direct, Page). The following example shows how the Page component is used to create a link between application pages.

First, an extract from the page's HTML template:

```
Click <jwc id=" login">here</jwc> to login.
```

Second, a portion of the page's specification:

```
<component>
  <id>login</id>
  <type>Page</type>

  <bindings>
    <static-binding>
      <name>page</name>
      <value>Login</value>
    </static-binding>
  </bindings>
</component>
```

The login component will locate the page service, and provide 'Login' (the name of the target page) as a parameter. The page service will build and return an appropriate URL (*/servlet/path/page/Login*), which the login component will incorporate into the `<a>` hyperlink it generates.

If the user later clicks that link, the application will invoke the page service to handle the URL; it will extract the page name (Login) and render that page.

The other services are more or less complicated, but share the same basic trait: the service provides the URL and later responds if the URL is triggered.

Application Specification

The application specification is used to identify the name of the application, the engine class for the application, the details of each page in the application, and to set up aliases for commonly used components within the application.

The application specification is loaded when the application servlet is initialized.

The application specification begins with an XML header:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE application PUBLIC
    "-//Primix Solutions//Tapestry Specification 1.0//EN"
    "http://tapestry.sourceforge.net/dtd/Tapestry_1_0.dtd">

<application>
```

The name of the application is specified. This name should be unique for all Tapestry applications running within a servlet container. It may contain letters, numbers, periods, spaces, underscores and dashes.

```
<name>application name</name>
```

The class name of the engine for the application is specified next:

```
<engine-class>class name</engine-class>
```

Most applications will use the engine `com.primix.tapestry.engine.SimpleEngine`, or a subclass of `SimpleEngine` specific to the application.

Each page in the application is now defined, with a logical name:

```
<page>
  <name>page name</name>
  <specification-path>specification path</specification-path>
</page>
```

The name of the page must be unique within the application. It may contain letters, numbers, underscores, periods or dashes.

The specification path is the path of the component specification for the page, a resource within the Java class path. For example `/com/skunkworx/skunkapp/Home.jwc`.

Typically, the name of the page will match the name of the component; the logical name Home will map to `/com/skunkworx/skunkapp/Home.jwc` and be implemented by class `com.skunkworx.skunkapp.Home`. This is not a hard and fast rule, it may make sense to use different names; for example, a multi-page wizard may show the relationship between the pages using a name like *WizardNamePageName*. In other cases, naming conflicts can be eliminated by varying the name of the page's logical name or component.

Following this, aliases for components may be defined:

```
<component-alias>
  <alias>alias</alias>
  <specification-path>specification path</specification-path>
</component-alias>
```

This is used to create a short, memorable name for a frequently used component. Aliases have the same format as page names.

Component aliases are mostly freeform (letters, numbers and some punctuation are acceptable). A good guideline is to name the alias, the specification and the Java class the same. This naming pattern is used for all the internal Tapestry components. For example, the component `/com/primix/tapestry/components/Action.jwc` has an alias of Action and is implemented by the class `com.primix.tapestry.components.Action`.

The next section is optional, it allows additional application properties to be specified.

```
<properties>
  <property>
    <name>name</name>
    <value>value</value>
  </property>
</properties>
```

Any number of `<property>` elements may be included within the `<properties>` element. Each one specifies a name/value pairing (both the name and the value are strings). These properties are used to express additional information about the application that isn't captured in the main DTD.

The most common use for this is to establish the class name of the visit class. The SimpleEngine uses the property `com.primix.tapestry.visit-class` for this purpose, the value is the complete class name for the visit object.

Finally, the specification is completed by closing the application element:

```
</application>
```

Understanding the Request Cycle

Web applications are significantly different in structure from other types of interactive applications. Because of the stateless nature of HTTP (the underlying communication protocol between web browsers and web servers), the server is constantly "picking up the pieces" of a conversation with the client.

This is complicated further in a high-end system that utilizes load balancing and fail over. In these cases, the server is expected to pick up a conversation started by some other server.

The Java Servlet API provides a base for managing the client - server interactions, by providing the `HttpSession` object, which is used to store server-side state information for a particular client.

Tapestry picks up from there, allowing the application engine, pages and components to believe (with just a little bit of work) that they are in continuous contact with the client web browser.

At the center of this is the request cycle. This request cycle is so fundamental under Tapestry that a particular object represents it, and it is used throughout the process of responding to a client request and creating an HTML response.

Each application service makes use of the request cycle in its own way. We'll describe the three common application services (page, action and direct), in detail.

In most cases, it is necessary to think in terms of two consecutive request cycles. In the first request cycle, a particular page is rendered and, along the way, any number of URLs are generated and included in the HTML. The second request cycle is triggered by one of those service URLs.

Page service

The page service is used for basic navigation between pages in the application. The page service is tightly tied to the Page component.

A page service URL is of the form:

```
/servlet_path/page/page_name
```

The request cycle for the page service is relatively simple.

- The service extracts the page name from the URL
- The named page is loaded and rolled back to its last recorded state
- The page is rendered to provide the HTML response sent back to the client

Direct service

The direct service is used to trigger a particular action. This service is tied to the Direct component.

A direct service URL is of the form:

```
/servlet_path/direct/page_name /id_path/context
```

The request cycle for the direct service is more complicated than the page service.

- The service extracts the page name from the URL
- The page is loaded and its persistent state is rolled back to its last recorded state
- The service extracts the id path from the URL
- The component is located within the page, using its id path
- The component is notified that it has been triggered, with the context passed as an array of Strings
- The component locates its listener
- The listener is informed that the component was triggered
- The listener reacts in an application specific way, and may update the state of any number of pages
- The listener may optionally select a new page to render a response
- The state of any changed pages is recorded by the page recorders
- The result page (the page specified in the URL, unless overridden by the listener) is rendered to provide the HTML response sent back to the client

This is the way in which applications respond to the user. What's key is the component's listener, of type `com.primix.tapestry.components.IDirectListener`. This is the hook that allows pre-defined components from the Tapestry framework to access application specific behavior. The page or container of the Direct component provide the necessary listener objects using dynamic bindings.

The direct service is useful in many cases, but does have its limitations. The state of the page when the listener is invoked is its state just prior to rendering (in the previous request cycle). This can cause a problem when the action to be performed is reliant on state that changes during the rendering of the page. In those cases, the action service (and Action or Form components) should be used.

The Direct component has an optional parameter named `context`. The value for this may be a single String, an array of Strings, or a `List` of Strings. These strings are added to the URL after the id path. When the action is triggered, the array is reconstructed (from the URL) and provided to the Direct component and its listener. This is primarily used to encode dynamic page state directly into the URL when doing so is not compatible with the action service (described in the next section).

The most common use for this context is to record an identifier for some object that is affected by the link. For example, if the link is designed to remove an item from the shopping cart (in an e-commerce example), the context could identify which item to remove in terms of a primary key, or line number within the order.

Action service

The action service is also used to trigger a particular application-specific action using an Action component, and its listener. The action service is also used by the Form component to process HTML form submissions.

An action service URL is of the form:

```
/servlet prefix/action/page name/action id/component id path
```

The request cycle for the action service is more complicated than the direct service. This sequence assumes that the component is an Action, the details of handling form submissions are described in a later section.

- The service extracts the page name from the URL
- The page is loaded and rolled back to its last recorded state
- The service extracts the action id and component id path from the URL
- A render of the page is started, with output discarded
- Each component "goes through the motions" of rendering

- Eventually, the Action component identifies that the page has been rewound (the action id in the URL matches the current action id)⁵
- The Action component locates its listener
- The listener is informed that the action was triggered
- The listener reacts in an application specific way, and may update the state of any number of pages
- The listener may optionally select a new page to render a response
- The Action component terminates the rewind cycle
- The state of any changed pages is recorded by the page recorders
- The result page (the page specified in the URL, unless overridden by the listener) is rendered to provide the HTML response sent back to the client

The process of restoring the page's dynamic state is called rewinding. Rewinding is used to go beyond restoring a page's persistent state and actually restore the page's dynamic state. Whatever state the page was in when the action URL was rendered in the previous request cycle is restored before the action's listener is invoked.

Use of the action service is convenient, but not always appropriate. Deeply nested Foreach components will result in a geometric increase in processing time to respond to actions (as well as render the HTML).

If the data on the page is not easily accessible then the action service should be avoided. For example, if the page is generated from a long running database query. Alternate measures, such as storing the results of the query as persistent page state should be used.

Another alternative is to use the direct service (and Direct component) instead, as it allows the necessary context to be encoded into the URL. This can be very useful when the dynamic state of the page is dependant on expensive or unpredictably changing data (such as a database query).

For example, a product catalog could encode the primary key of the products listed as direct service parameters to create links to a product details page.

⁵ The Action compares its id path against the target id path from the URL. If there's a mismatch, it throws a `StaleLinkException`. This may occur due to the user moving backwards (using the browser back button) and submitting a form.

Action service and forms

Processing of requests for Form components is a little more complicated than for ordinary Action components. This is because a Form will wrap a number of form-related components, such as TextField, Select, Option, Checkbox and others.

In order to accept the results posted in the HTML form, each of these components must be given a chance to respond to the request. A component responds to the request by extracting a request parameter from the `HttpServletRequest`, interpreting it, and assigning a value through a parameter. Most Form related components also have an optional listener, which will be notified after the value is assigned.

As with an Action component again, a full rewind must be done, to account for conditional portions of the page and Foreaches.

The Form component doesn't terminate the rewind cycle until after all of its wrapped components have had a chance to render. It then notifies its own listener.

The basic components, Text and TextField, are quite simple. They are simply moving text between the application, the HTML and the submitted request.

Individual Checkbox components are also simple: they set a boolean property. A combination of a Select and several Option components are used to manage a set of flags. A RadioGroup and some Radio components allow a property to be set to a value (dependent on which Radio button is selected by the user).

The PropertySelection component is designed to more efficiently handle this and can produce HTML for either a popup list or a collection of radio buttons.

Tapestry also includes more complicated components, ValidatingTextField and some relatives. These are similar to the simple TextField component, but provide greater validation and checking of input, and provide the ability to visually mark fields that are required or in error.

Provided Components

The Tapestry framework provides a large set of pre-written components to use as a starting point for building applications, or more complicated components.

This section will provide a brief overview of the available components and their most commonly used parameters. The Javadoc is the final reference for this information. All components live in the `com.primix.tapestry.components` package.

Each of these components is automatically added as an alias in an application specification.

Action

Creates an `<a>` hyperlink in the HTML response. If the link is triggered, then the Action retrieves its listener, and invokes `actionTriggered()` on it.

Parameter	Description
listener	The object notified when the link is triggered.
enabled	Controls whether the link is produced, if false, then the link is not created, but the contents are still rendered.

Any

Used to make an existing HTML element dynamic. Informal parameters are used to fill in the attributes of the element.

Parameter	Description
element	The element to be produced

Body

Replaces the `<body>` tag. The Body component provides some support for other components, such as the Rollover component.

Checkbox

Used to implement a checkbox form element. Must be wrapped by a Form component.

Parameter	Description
selected	Indicates whether the checkbox is selected or not.
disabled	Controls whether the text field is active or not.

Conditional

Makes part of an HTML template conditional. The body of the Conditional component is only rendered if a specified condition is met.

Parameter	Description
condition	The condition to be met.
invert	If true, then the condition is inverted. This is useful for simulating an else clause.

DatabaseQuery

A wrapper around a JDBC query. It converts each row selected from the database into a Map that it provides to its container, much like a Foreach component.

Parameter	Description
connection	The JDBC Connection to execute the query on.
query	A SQL query to execute.
row	A property to update with each row from the query.

DateField

A kind of validating text field that allows a date to be entered.

Parameter	Description
date	The date property to be edited.
delegate	An IValidationDelegate used to handle validation exceptions.
maximum	The latest acceptable date (optional).
minimum	The earliest acceptable date (optional).
required	If true, a value must be entered.

Delegator

A component which delegates its behavior (that is, the HTML renders) to some other object. This is occasionally useful when the HTML to render is best generated from pure Java code (or has been provided from some source outside of Tapestry).

Parameter	Description
delegate	The object which will provide the rendering for the component.

Direct

Creates a <a> hyperlink that notifies the component when the link is triggered. The link includes some context-specific data that is passed on to the component's listener. This is used in cases where the Action component can't be used (or is too inefficient).

Parameter	Description
listener	Specifies an object that is notified when the link is clicked.
context	An array of Strings to be encoded into the URL. These parameters will be decoded when the link is triggered.
enabled	Controls whether the link is produced. If disabled, the portion of the template the link surrounds is still rendered, but not the link itself.

ExceptionDisplay

A component, used on the standard exception page, used to render a detailed list of the exceptions.

Parameter	Description
exceptions	An array of <code>com.primix.foundation.exception.ExceptionDescription</code> objects

FieldLabel

A component, used with a `ValidatingTextField` (or similar component) that provides the label for the field. A delegate object may be specified that will change the visual formatting of the label to reflect the state of the field, for instance, to make the label red when the field itself is in error.

Parameter	Description
field	The validating text field associated with the label.
delegate	An optional <code>IValidationDelegate</code> , responsible for the visual look of the label.

Foreach

A component that loops through a set of values, setting a property for each value before rendering its wrapped elements.

Parameter	Description
source	The source of objects to be iterated.
value	Used to update the current value on each iteration.

Form

A component that manages an HTML form. The other form-related components must be wrapped inside the `Form`.

Parameter	Description
method	The value to use for the method attribute of the <code><form></code> tag.
listener	The listener, informed after the wrapped components of the form have had a chance to respond to the request.

Hidden

Adds a hidden (`<input type=hidden>`) field to a Form. This is often used to synchronize data known when the page containing the Hidden was created.

Parameter	Description
value	Property to store when the form is rendered and to restore when the form is submitted.

Image

Used to insert a static image.

Parameter	Description
image	The image to show, specified as an asset.

ImageButton

An image button inside a Form. Clicking the button submits the form.

Parameter	Description
disabled	If true, the image button will be disabled (not respond to the mouse).
image	The image to show, specified as an asset.
selected	A property updated if the button is clicked.
tag	The value assigned to the selected property if the button is clicked.

Insert

Inserts dynamic text into the HTML response. Invalid characters (such as `<` and `>`) are converted into HTML entities (`<` and `>`).

Parameter	Description
value	The value to be inserted, which may be a string or an arbitrary object (that is converted to a string).
format	An format (<code>java.text.Format</code>) object used to format the String or object.

InsertURL

Used to insert the URL of an asset

Parameter	Description
asset	The asset whose URL is to be inserted.

InsertWrapped

Renders the static HTML and components wrapped by the container of the InsertWrapped component. Components which have HTML templates and can wrap other elements should include exactly one InsertWrapped component in their template.

IntegerField

A type of validating text field that is used to edit an integer property.

Parameter	Description
value	The property to edit.
delegate	An IValidationDelegate that is used to handle validation exceptions.
required	If true, a value must be provided by the user.
minimum	Optional minimum acceptable value.
maximum	Optional maximum acceptable value.

Option

Implements a component that manages an HTML <option> form element, and must be wrapped by a Select component.

Parameter	Description
selected	Used to indicate whether the given option is selected.

Page

Creates a link to another page within the application.

Parameter	Description
page	The name of a page to link to.
enabled	Controls whether the link is produced. If disabled, the portion of the template the link surrounds is still rendered, but not the link itself.

PropertySelection

Creates either a `<select>` or a sequence of `<input type=radio>` controls that ultimately allow a property to be set. Uses a model to map between Java values that will be assigned, and textual labels that will appear in the HTML response.

Parameter	Description
value	The property value to edit.
model	The model used to enumerate the potential values, and to produce text labels for each value.
renderer	An object used to render the property selection; two default implementations are provided (one creates a pop up list, the other a table of radio buttons).

Radio

Implements a component that manages an HTML form element. Such a component must be wrapped (possibly indirectly) inside a `RadioGroup` component.

Parameter	Description
value	The value to be assigned through the <code>RadioGroup</code> 's selected parameter, if the <code>Radio</code> is selected by the user.
disabled	If true, then the <code>Radio</code> is disabled. It will write a <code>disabled</code> attribute into its tag when rendering, and will not update its selected binding.

RadioGroup

A container of `Radio` components, which itself must be within a `Form` component. The `RadioGroup` and `Radio` components combined provide similar functionality to the `PropertySelection` component (though with some greater flexibility).

Parameter	Description
selected	The property to be updated by the RadioGroup based on which Radio button is selected by the user.

Rollover

Works with any kind of link component, which must wrap it, to provide a rollover image button ... a button where the image changes when the mouse move over it or off of it. A Rollover is disabled if the link that wraps it is disabled.

Parameter	Description
image	The (initial) image to show (if not disabled).
focus	The image displayed when the mouse moves over the button (unless disabled).
blur	The image displayed when the mouse moves off of the button (unless disabled).
disabled	The image displayed if the link is itself disabled.

Script

A component that accesses a script file and adds JavaScript functions and statements to the response page. The specified script file is read and parsed and substitutions are made before the final scripting code is inserted into the page.

Parameter	Description
script	The resource path of the script file.

Select

A wrapper around Option components, within a Form.

Parameter	Description
multiple	If true, the component allows multiple selection.

Service

A component for creating a link for an arbitrary service that uses no parameters, such as the reset or home service.

Parameter	Description
service	The name of the service.
enabled	Controls whether the link is produced. If disabled, the portion of the template the link surrounds is still rendered, but not the link itself.

Shell

Provides the outer "shell" of a page, including the `<html>`, `<head>` and `<title>` tags (but not the `<body>` tag).

Parameter	Description
title	Title for the page, placed within a <code><title></code> element.
stylesheet	Stylesheet to be used on the page.

Submit

Provides a form submit button (`<input type=submit>`). This is most useful when the form contains multiple submit buttons and the application needs to know which was actually pressed.

Parameter	Description
disabled	If true, the submit button will be disabled.
label	The label to put on the button.
selected	A property updated if the button is the one clicked to submit the form.
tag	The value applied to the selected property if the button is the one clicked to submit the form.

ShowInspector

Adds a link to a page that is used to raise the Tapestry Inspector in a new window. This is generally added to the navigational border of an application.

Text

Implements a component that manages an HTML `<textarea>` form element, within a Form component.

Parameter	Description
text	The text inside the text area.
disabled	Controls whether the textarea is active or not.
columns	The width of the textarea, in characters.
rows	The number of rows in the textarea.

TextField

Implements a component that manages an HTML `<input type=text>` or `<input type=password>` form element, within a Form component.

Parameter	Description
text	The text inside the text field.
hidden	If true, then the text field is written as a <code><input type=password></code> form element.
disabled	Controls whether the text field is active or not.
displayWidth	Controls the display width of the text control in the client browser.
maxLength	Controls the maximum number of characters that the text control will accept

ValidatingTextField

An improved TextField that can perform simple validations. The field may be required, and a minimum length may be specified.

Parameter	Description
text	The text inside the text field.
hidden	If true, then the text field is written as a <code><input type=password></code> form element.
disabled	Controls whether the text field is active or not.
displayWidth	Controls the display width of the text control in the client browser.
required	If true, a value must be provided by the user.
delegate	An <code>IVValidationDelegate</code> instance used to handle validation errors.
minimumLength	Optional, the minimum number of characters that may be entered.

Designing Tapestry Applications

When first starting to design a Tapestry application, the designer consider some basic elements as a guide to the overall design of the application.

Persistent Storage Strategy

Tapestry pages store a certain amount of client state between request cycles. Each implementation of the `IEngine` interface provides a different strategy.

Currently, only the `com.primix.tapestry.engine.SimpleEngine` class is provided with the framework; it uses in-memory page recorders. When the engine is serialized, the page recorders are serialized along with it.

The `IPageRecorder` interface doesn't specify anything about how a page recorder works. This opens up many possibilities for storage of state, including flat files, databases, stateful EJB session beans, or HTTP Cookies.

In fact, a very sophisticated application could mix and match, using cookies for some pages, in-memory for others.

By default, page recorders stay active for the duration of the user session. If a page will not be referenced again, or its persistent state is no longer relevant or needed, the application may explicitly "forget" its state.

Remember that for load balancing and fail over reasons, the engine will be serialized and de-serialized. Ideally, its serialized state should be less than two kilobytes; because Java serialization is inefficient, this does not leave much room.

Identify Pages and Page Flow

Early in the design process, the page flow of the application should be identified. Each page should be identified and given a specific name.

Page names are less structured than other identifiers in Tapestry. They may contain letters, numbers, underscores, dashes and periods. Tapestry makes absolutely no interpretation on the page names.

In many applications, certain parts of the functionality are implemented as "wizards", several related pages that are used in sequence as part of a business process. A common example of this is initial user registration, or when submitting an order to an e-commerce system.

A good page naming convention for this case is "*wizard-name.page-name*" (a period separates the two names). This visually identifies that several pages are related. In addition, a Java package for the wizard should be created to contain the Java classes, component specifications, HTML templates and other assets related to the wizard.

The designer must also account for additional entry points to the Application beyond the standard home page. These may require additional application services (see below).

Identify Common Logic

Many applications will have common logic that appears on many pages. For example, an e-commerce system may have a shopping cart, and have many different places where an item can be added to the cart.

In many cases, the logic for this can be centralized in the visit object. The visit object may implement methods for adding products to the shopping cart. This could take the form of Java methods, component listeners.

In addition, most web applications have a concept of a 'user'. The object representing the user should be a property of the visit object, making it accessible to all pages and components.

Most Tapestry applications will involve some interaction with Enterprise JavaBeans. The code to lookup home interfaces, or to gain access to session beans, is typically located in the visit object.

Listener code, on various pages, will cast the visit object to the appropriate actual class and invoke methods.

The following example demonstrates this idea. *Visit* is a hypothetical visit object that uses EJBs.

```
public IActionListener getListener()
{
    return new IActionListener()
    {
        public void actionTriggered(IComponent component,
                                    IRequestCycle cycle)
        {
```

```

        Visit visit;
        ISomeHomeInterface home;

        visit = (Visit )getVisit();

        home = visit .getSomeHomeInterface();

        try
        {
            // etc.
        }
        catch (RemoteException e)
        {
            throw new ApplicationRuntimeException(e);
        }
    }
};
}

```

Identify Engine Services

Tapestry applications will need to define new engine services when a page must be referenced from outside the Tapestry application

This is best explained by example. It is reasonable in an e-commerce system that there is a particular page that shows product information for a particular product. This information includes description, price, availability, user reviews, etc. A user may want to bookmark that page and return to it on a later session.

Tapestry doesn't normally allow this; the page may be bookmarked, but when the bookmark is triggered, the page may not render correctly, because it will not know which product to display. The URLs normally generated in a Tapestry application are very context sensitive; they are only meaningful in terms of the user's navigation throughout the application, starting with the Home page. When bookmarked, that context is lost.

The built-in action and direct services reject any URL if there isn't an existing `HttpSession`. They redirect to a `StaleSession` page, that warns the use of what has occurred and allows them to start the application fresh (a standard page for this is provided by Tapestry, but can be overridden by an application that wants to provide different content or look-and-feel).

By defining a new engine service, the necessary context can be encoded directly into the URL, in a way similar to how the direct action works. This is partially a step backwards towards typical servlet or JSP development, but even here Tapestry offers superior services. In the e-commerce example, the service URL could encode some form of product identifier.

An example of this is in the Primix Virtual Library application. In order to make certain pages bookmarkable, a new service named "external" was created. This involved subclassing `com.primix.tapestry.engine.SimpleEngine` to provide the new service.

The external service includes the name of a page and the primary key of an object that page displays (this was simplified by the design of the Vlib entity beans, which always use an Integer as the primary key).

The external service works much the same as the page service, except that it invokes an additional method on the page, `setup()`, which is passed the primary key extracted from the URL.

The end result is that when a user arrives at such a page, the URL used identifies the page and the primary key. Bookmarking the page stores the URL so that when the bookmark is later opened, the correct data is read and displayed.

Identify Common Components

Even before detailed design of an application, certain portions of pages will be common to most, if not all, pages. The canonical example is a "navigation bar", a collection of links and buttons used to navigate to specific pages within the application. An e-commerce site may have a shopping cart related component that can appear in many places.

In many cases, common components may need to be parameterized: the navigation bar may need a parameter to specify what pages are to appear; the shopping cart component will require a shopping cart object (the component is the view and controller, the shopping cart object is the model).

Other examples of common components are viewers and editors of common data types.

In the Virtual Library, components that make use of the external service were created. The components, `BookLink` and `PersonLink`, took as parameters the corresponding objects (Book or Person) and created links to the pages that displayed the details of that Book or Person.

Coding Tapestry Applications

After performing the design steps from the previous chapter, it is time to start coding. The designs will imply certain requirements for the implementations.

Application Engine

Application engines will be serialized and de-serialized as part of load balancing and fail over. As much as possible, attributes of the application object should be transient. For example, the instance variable that holds the `ApplicationSpecification` is transient; if needed (after de-serialization), the application can locate the specification from its servlet (the servlet reads the application specification once, when it is first initialized).

This is largely not an issue, since most applications use a provided class, such as `com.primix.tapestry.engine.SimpleEngine`. Subclassing is only necessary when the application requires new engine services, or needs a different method of instantiating the visit object.

Visit Object

The visit object will contain all the data about a client's visit to the web application. If possible, it should have a no-arguments constructor (this allows `SimpleEngine` to instantiate it as needed).

Keeping the size of the serialized engine small is a good goal for overall performance and scalability, and the visit object is serialized with the engine. During initial development, the visit object should implement that `java.io.Serializable` interface.

Once the application, and the structure of the visit object, is stable, the more efficient `java.io.Externalizable` interface should be implemented instead.

In addition, deferring the creation of the visit object as late as possible is also of benefit.

Enterprise JavaBeans Support

The visit object should provide access to the most commonly used Enterprise JavaBeans used in the application. It can provide a central location for the common code (related to JNDI and to narrowing EJB references), rather than have that scattered throughout the application.

It is important to remember that EJB references are *not* serializable. However, it is possible to convert between an EJB reference and an EJB handle, and handles *are* serializable. The visit should make any instance variables that store EJB references transient, and should perform extra serialization work to serialize and restore the necessary EJB handles.

Page classes

It is often useful to create one or two subclasses of `com.primix.tapestry.BasePage` specific to your application. Often your application will have a consistent navigational border on some or all pages that can be supported by the base class.

Many applications have one set of pages that are visible to unidentified guests, and a second section that is visible once the user logs in. A base class for the second set of pages could override the `validate()` method to redirect to a login page if the user is not already logged in.

Designing new components

Creating new components using Tapestry is designed to be quite simple.

Components are typically created through aggregation, that is, by combining existing components using an HTML template and specification.

You will almost always want to define a short alias for your new component in the application specification. This insulates developers from minor name changes to the component specification, such as moving the component to a different Java package.

Like pages, components should reset their state back to default values when the page they are contained within is returned to the pool.

Most components do not have any state. A component which does should implement the `ILifecycle` interface, and implement the `reset()` method.

The `reset()` method is invoked from the page's `detach()` method, which is invoked at the very end of the request cycle, just before the page is returned to the page pool.

Choosing a base class

There are two basic types of components: those that use an HTML template, and those that don't.

Nearly all of the base components provided with the Tapestry framework don't use templates. They inherit from the class `com.primix.tapestry.AbstractComponent`. Such components must implement the `render()` method.

Components that use templates inherit from a subclass of `AbstractComponent`: `com.primix.tapestry.BaseComponent`. They should leave the `render()` method alone (it already does what it should ... load the template if necessary and render itself using the template).

In some cases, a new component can be written just by combining existing components (this often involves using inherited bindings). Such a codeless component will consist of just a specification and an HTML template and will use the `BaseComponent` class.

Parameters and Bindings

You may create a component that has parameters. Under Tapestry, component parameters are a kind of "named slot" that can be wired up as a source (or sink) of data in a number of ways. This "wiring up" is actually accomplished using binding objects.

The page loader, the object that converts a component specification into an actual component, is responsible for creating and assigning the bindings. It uses the method `setBinding()` to assign a binding with a name. Your component can retrieve the binding by name using `getBinding()`.

For example, let's create a component that allows the color of a span of text to be specified using a `java.awt.Color` object. The component has a required parameter named 'color'. The class's `render()` method is below:

```
public void render(IResponseWriter writer, IRequestCycle cycle)
    throws RequestCycleException
{
    IBinding colorBinding;
    Color color;
    String encodedColor;

    colorBinding = getBinding("color");
    color = (Color)colorBinding.getValue();
    encodedColor = RequestContext.encodeColor(color);

    writer.begin("font");
    writer.attribute("color", encodedColor);

    renderWrapped(writer, cycle);

    writer.end();
}
```

The call to `getBinding()` is relatively expensive, since it involves rummaging around in a `java.util.Map` and then casting the result from `java.lang.Object` to `com.primix.tapestry.IBinding`.

Because bindings are typically set once and then read frequently by the component, implementing them as private instance variables is much more efficient. Tapestry allows for this as an optimization on frequently used components.

The `setBinding()` method in `AbstractComponent` checks to see if there is a read/write JavaBeans property named "*name*Binding" for type `com.primix.tapestry.IBinding`. In this example, it would look for the methods `getColorBinding()` and `setColorBinding()`.

If the methods are found, they are invoked from `getBinding()` and `setBinding()` instead of updating the `Map`.

This changes the example to:

```
private IBinding colorBinding;
```

```

public void setColorBinding(IBinding value)
{
    colorBinding = value;
}

public IBinding getColorBinding()
{
    return colorBinding;
}

public void render(IResponseWriter writer, IRequestCycle cycle)
    throws RequestCycleException
{
    Color color;
    String encodedColor;

    color = (Color)colorBinding.getValue();
    encodedColor = RequestContext.encodeColor(color);

    writer.begin("font");
    writer.attribute("color", encodedColor);

    renderWrapped(writer, cycle);

    writer.end();
}

```

This is a trade off; slightly more code for slightly better performance. There is also a memory bonus; the `Map` used by `AbstractComponent` will never be created.

Persistent Component State

Like pages (described further in the document), individual components may have state that persists between request cycles. This is rare for non-page components, but still possible and useful in special circumstances.

A client that must persist some client state uses its page's `changeObserver`. It simply posts `ObservedChangeEvents` with itself (not its page) as the source. In practice, it still simply invokes the `fireObservedChange()` method.

In addition, the component should implement the interface `ILifecycle`, and the method `reset()` and, within that method, reset all instance variables to default values, just as a page does (in its `detachFromApplication()` method).

Component Assets

Tapestry components are designed for easy re-use. Most components consist of a specification, a Java class and an HTML template.

Some components may need more; they may have additional image files, sounds, Flash animations, QuickTime movies or whatever. These are collectively called "assets".

Assets come in three flavors: external, internal and private.

- An external asset is just a fancy way of packaging a URL at an arbitrary web site.
- An internal asset represents a file with a URL relative to the web server containing the Tapestry application.
- A private asset is a file within the class path, that is, packaged with the component in a Java Archive (JAR) file. Obviously, such assets are not normally visible to the web server.

Components which use assets don't care what flavor they are; they simply rely on the method `buildURL()` to provide a URL they can incorporate into the HTML they generate. For example, the Image component has an image parameter that is used to build the src attribute of an HTML `` element.

Assets figure prominently into three areas: reuse, deployment and localization.

Internal and private assets may be localized: when needed, a search occurs for a localized version, relative to a base name provided in the component specification.

Private assets simplify both re-use and deployment. They allow a re-usable Tapestry component, even one with associated images, style sheets (or other assets) to be incorporated into a Tapestry application without any special consideration. For example, the standard exception page makes use of a private asset to access its stylesheet.

In a traditional web application, private assets would need to be packaged separately from the 'component' code and placed into some pre-defined directory visible to the web server.

Under Tapestry, the private assets are distributed with the component specification, HTML templates and Java code, within a Java Archive (JAR) file, or within the WEB-INF/classes directory of a Web Application Archive (WAR) file. The resources are located within the running application's class path.

The Tapestry framework takes care of making the private assets visible to the client web browser. This occurs in one of two ways:

- The private assets are copied out of the class path and to a directory visible to the web server. This requires some additional configuration of the Tapestry application servlet.
- The assets are dynamically accessed from the class path using the asset service.

Copying assets out of the class path and onto the web site is the best solution for final deployment, since it allows the assets to be retrieved as static files, an operation most web servers are optimized for.

Dynamically accessing assets requires additional operations in Java code. These operations are not nearly as efficient as static access. However, dynamic access is much more convenient during development since much less configuration (in this case, copying of assets) is necessary before testing the application.

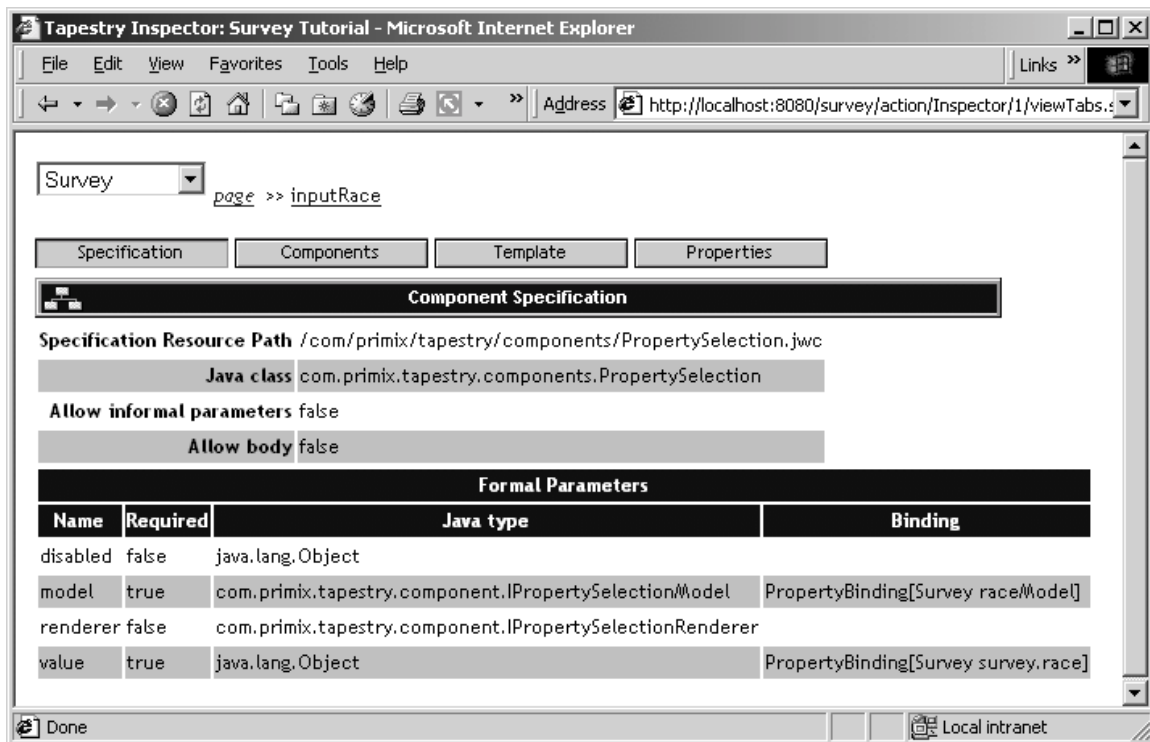
As with many things in Tapestry, the components using assets are blind as to how the assets are made visible to the client.

Finally, every component has an `assets` property that is an unmodifiable `java.util.Map`. The assets in the `Map` are accessible as if they were properties of the `Map`. In other words, the property path `assets.welcome` is valid, if the component defines an asset named 'welcome'.

The Tapestry Inspector

Tapestry includes a powerful tool: the Inspector, which reveals the construction of a running Tapestry application.

The ShowInspector component is used to include a link that launches the Inspector. This is typically included in the navigational border of an application, so that it is available to the developer from any page. The Inspector itself is a page that is provided by the framework and available to any Tapestry application.



The Inspector allows the developer to see how the page is constructed. It reveals the page's specification, a list of embedded components within the page, the page's HTML template and more.

It is possible to dig down and see the same information for any component within the page.

The Tapestry Inspector is currently evolving in terms of functionality and look-and-feel. More information will be added here when the Inspector has been finalized.