

JavaScript Frameworks

Section 1: Node and Express

1.1 Introduction to Node and Express

Node.js is a platform built on Google's V8 JavaScript runtime engine and allows to build fast and scalable network applications. This allows developers to use the JavaScript language on the backend.

Node.js can be installed from their website (<https://nodejs.org/en/>) and this also installs the Node Package Manager (NPM) which allows us to download packages/modules/libraries for our projects.

Express is a npm module/library that provides a minimalist web framework for Node which provides a robust set of features for web and mobile applications. To install express we use the following command to run in the terminal within our project directory.

```
$ npm install express --save
```

This will save express as a package dependencies within our package.json file as well as the associated files in the node_modules directory. The --save flag saves the package as a dependency of our project while the --save-dev saves packages as a development dependency.

To check whether the following Node, NPM and Express are installed on your machine we would run the following commands to display the versions installed.

```
$ npm --version $ node --version $ express --version
```

The Node REPL environment allows us to write JavaScript in the command line i.e. terminal. REPL stands for Read Evaluate Print Loop. We can write simple arithmetic and functions in the terminal and have the output returned back to us. To escape the Node Shell by pressing control + c at the same time on our keyboard twice.

Node is also able to serve files. If we have a .js file we can use the command node followed by the file path/name and the result of the file will be printed to the terminal window. Below is an example of a very simple Hello World application which is a proof of concept.

```
const express = require('express');
const app = express();

app.get('/hello', function(req, res) {
  res.send('hello from index.js');
});

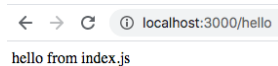
app.listen(3000);
```

The require function is used to import/access the express module. We use this to assign the express variable the entirety of the express module. We then assign the app variable to an instantiation of express. Anything we chain onto the app variable is a method from the express library.

The `.get()` method takes two parameters the first is the end route and the second is a callback function. The callback function takes in two parameters which is the request and the response. When we hit the `/hello` endpoint in the browser it will fire off this anonymous function. The function will attach to the `res` object the `.send()` method which will send back a string that says `'hello from index.js'` to the browsers terminal.

The `.listen()` method takes in one parameter which is the port number to listen on. Once the file is created we can run the following command in the terminal:

```
$ node index.js
```



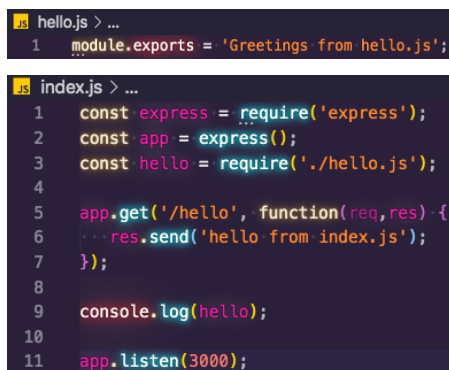
A screenshot of a web browser window. The address bar shows 'localhost:3000/hello'. The page content displays 'hello from index.js'.

This will run the code inside of the `index.js` file and when it does we will see a blinking cursor in the terminal. This means the web server is running on `localhost:3000`. If we navigate to <http://localhost:3000/hello> in the browser we should see `'hello from index.js'` printed in the browser. This indicates the application route was a success.

1.2 Nodemon

Our code will be much easier to manage if we are able to separate the code into different files. Ideally we would separate our code into files that contain no more than one function or component. To handle this modularity JavaScript comes equipped with imports and exports.

In order to use function from File B in File A we have to export the function from File B and import the function into File A. Below is an example of exporting a string from `hello.js` to `index.js` using node's `module.exports` and `require` keywords.



A screenshot showing two code files. The first file, `hello.js`, contains the line `module.exports = 'Greetings from hello.js';`. The second file, `index.js`, contains the following code: `const express = require('express');`, `const app = express();`, `const hello = require('./hello.js');`, `app.get('/hello', function(req, res) { res.send('hello from index.js'); });`, `console.log(hello);`, and `app.listen(3000);`.

The `module.exports` puts a wrapper around the string in a nice little package which makes it so that we can transfer it from one file to another. On line 3 of the `index.js` file we are declaring a variable called `hello` and then assigning its value to everything that is inside of the `hello.js` file using the `require` function.

The `hello` variable is used to print the string to the terminal window/console. This demonstrates the successful export/import from one file to another.

In addition to this we would want to install a package called `nodemon`. `Nodemon` is a package that updates the browsers without restarting the server. Therefore, as we work on developing our files, instead of having to restart our server every time we make a change to see the changes, `nodemon` will do this for us automatically without having to do any extra work.

To install `nodemon` we would want to go to the terminal window and run the following command while `cd` into the root project directory. This will save `nodemon` as a development dependency module/package in our `package.json` file.

```
$ npm install --save-dev nodemon
```

Finally, we would update the package.json script parameter so that it would run nodemon on our index.js file whenever we run the script.

```
... "scripts": {  
  ... "test": "echo \"Error: no test specified\" && exit 1",  
  ... "start": "nodemon ./src/index.js"  
  ... },  
  ... },  
  ... }
```



1.3 Middleware Functions

We are going to take a look at creating multiple routes including sub-routes and routes that use middleware. Below is an example file of different routes which uses the `res.send()` method to send a message to the browser when the endpoint is hit.

```
const express = require('express');  
const app = express();  
const hello = require('./hello.js');  
var PORT = process.env.PORT || 3000;  
  
app.get('/hello', function(req, res) {  
  res.send(hello);  
});  
  
app.get('/example', function(req, res) {  
  res.send('Hello from the example route');  
});  
  
app.get('/example/b', function(req, res) {  
  res.send('Hello from sub route B!');  
});
```

On the example to the left we can see a route of `/example` which will print `'Hello from the example route'` whenever we visit or hit the URL <http://localhost:3000/example> in the browser.

The `/example` route has a sub-route of `/example/b` which will print `'Hello from sub route B!'` in the browser whenever we visit or hit the URL <http://localhost:3000/example/b> in the browser.

This is triggered by the anonymous callback function whenever we hit the endpoints which the `res.send()` method will print out the string attached to the response object.

On the example to the left we have a callback function which has three parameters, two that we have seen before (`req` and `res`) but an additional parameter of `next`. The `next` parameter tells our code to move onto the next middleware function if there is any at all. If we do not add a `next()` function call, the code will get stuck on the first callback and therefore it is imperative that we add this. The `next()` function being invoked allows us to move onto the next callback i.e. `callbackTwo`.

```
var callbackOne = function(req, res, next) {  
  console.log('callbackOne');  
  next();  
};  
  
var callbackTwo = function(req, res, next) {  
  console.log('callbackTwo');  
  next();  
};  
  
var callbackThree = function(req, res, next) {  
  console.log('callbackThree says hello from route C!');  
  res.send('callback triggered');  
};
```

In route `/example/d` below the `.get()` method has two callback functions, one right after the other. The reason we are able to structure our code like this is due to the `next()` parameter/function which will tell our code to move onto the next function in sequence. Therefore, navigating to the `/example/d` route the function will fire off a `console.log()` printing the string to the terminal window and the second function will use the `.send()` method to write a message to the browser window.

```
app.get('/example/d',  
  function(req, res, next) {  
    console.log('The response will be sent by the next function...');  
    next();  
  },  
  function(req, res) {  
    res.send('Hello from D!');  
  }  
);
```

We can pass middleware function in an array as seen in the example below. The three callback functions are being passed in as a single parameter all at once. When we hit the endpoint URL <http://localhost:3000/example/c/withmiddleware> we would see the string 'callback triggered' printed in the browser window. This demonstrates that all the callbacks were not only fired off but the next function in the callbackOne and callbackTwo were being called successfully so that the final callbackThree callback function is triggered.

```
app.get('/example/c/withmiddleware', [callbackOne, callbackTwo, callbackThree]);
```

In conclusion, there are many types of middleware some that are simple and can tell the data/time, some will print to the console, some will print to the screen and some can be more complex and have a far more important functionality for example parsing and validating data as it comes in. That is what middleware is.

Middleware functions are functions that have access to the request object, response object and the next middleware function in the app response cycle. These middleware functions are used to modify the request and response object for actions such as parsing request body or adding request headers to name a few.

In the middleware example below it uses the in-built JavaScript function of `Date.now()` which will return the number of milliseconds elapsed since 01 January 1970. This is a simple example to demonstrate how middleware can be used to append date to an existing request object. The middleware will be called for every request to the server i.e. after each request a message will be sent to the terminal to show exactly when the request was made.

```
app.use('/hello', function(req, res, next) {  
  console.log('A new request was received at ' + Date.now());  
  next();  
});  
  
app.get('/hello', function(req, res) {  
  res.send(hello);  
});
```

This is one such example of how middleware works and there are many different use cases; however, the above demonstrates in a simple way how we can use middleware to modify our requests and response objects.

1.4 Router Methods

Now that we have seen how to create a route with an endpoint and callback function, we can now look at the router methods provided by the express module.

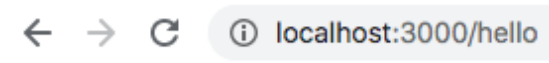
To create a route using the express module router methods we first need to create a new routes.js file which would contain all of our GET requests to our web-server routes.

The routes.js file will use the require function to import the express package and then we would declare a new variable router that will use the express.Router() i.e. the router variable will be assigned the entire express framework upon which the Router() method will be operating. At the very bottom of this file we need to export the router. This will export out some functionality that will be used in the index.js file.

```
src > routes.js > ...
1  var express = require('express');
2  var router = express.Router();
3
4  router.get('/', function(req, res) {
5    res.send('GET route on hello from routes.js');
6  });
7
8  module.exports = router;
```

```
src > index.js > ...
1  const express = require('express');
2  const route = require('./routes');
3  const app = express();
4  const PORT = process.env.PORT || 3000;
5
6  app.use('/hello', route);
7
8  app.listen(PORT, () => {
9    console.log(`Listening on port: ${PORT}`);
10 });
```

The index.js will import the routes.js export and assign it to a variable we named route. We would then use the .use() method on the express app object passing in the endpoint as the first parameter. When the server hears the endpoint it will activate the second parameter which reference the route variable which references the entire routes.js file that was exported.



GET route on hello from routes.js

When we now visit the URL <http://localhost:3000/hello> in our browser we should see the string appear in the browser window. This shows the route is coming from the correct source.

The reason we would want to use this structure is because we would be defining multiple routes on an app and sometimes they can be very tedious to maintain and therefore we would want to separate the routes.js file from our main index.js file to keep our code readable and maintainable i.e. if there are any bugs in the programme it will be easy to find and fix.

1.5 Path Module

Node.js has a Paths module which we can use with Express. We would require to import the path module and assign the entirety of this module to a variable. This path module has around 16 different methods (we will explore a few in detail below).

There will be times where we need to separate parts of the URL or dissect a file path and this module is a great tool for this purpose. Below is an example of how to use the module:

```
src > path.js > ...
1  const path = require('path');
2
3  console.log('basename: ', path.basename(__filename));
4  console.log('dirname: ', path.dirname(__filename));
```

```
$ node src/path.js
basename: path.js
```

In the example above the .basename() method will provide the full path to the base __filename which is path.js.

The `.dirname()` method returns the directory path for where the file is located e.g. `'/Users/Username/Documents/Node Example/src'`. This method returns everything except for the `basename` leading back to the root.

```
console.log('extension: ', path.extname(__filename));  
console.log('parse: ', path.parse(__filename));
```

The `.extname()` method returns the extension of the file in the above example this would return `.js` because `path.js` has a `.js` file extension.

The `.parse()` method allows us to parse a path object which contains all of the properties of the root, directory name, base name, extension name and name for the parameter (file) passed into the method using a single method. If we were so inclined we can use dot notation to extract only the base name property from this parsed object as seen in the below example.

```
console.log('parse: ', path.parse(__filename).base);
```

Important Note: The object properties are `root`, `dir`, `base`, `ext` and `name` and we must reference these property names when using the dot notation (method chaining) to return a selected property from an object.

Therefore, there are a number of ways that we can access different parts of the path, dissect the URL and use it to our advantage in our application's code.