

Thinking Mobile

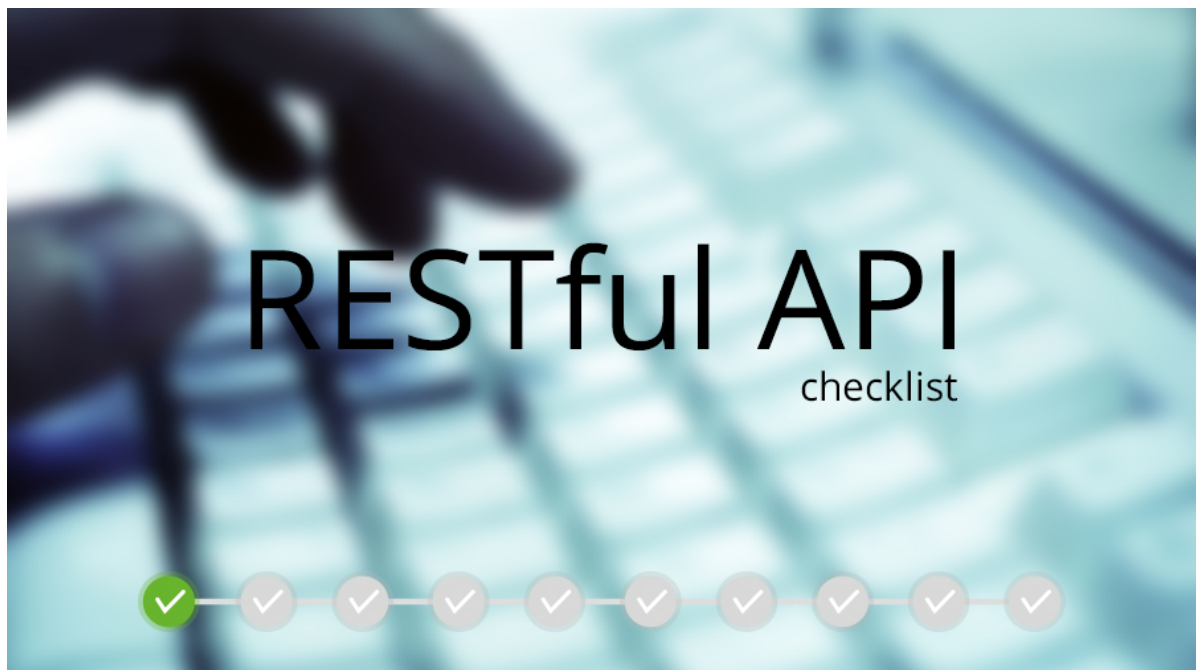
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10 Best Practices for Better RESTful API



Web APIs has become an very important topic in the last year. We at M-Way Solutions are working every day with different backend systems and therefore we know about the importance of a clean API design.

Typically we use a RESTful design for our web APIs. The concept of REST is to separate the API structure into logical resources. There are used the HTTP methods GET, DELETE, POST and PUT to operate with the resources.

These are 10 best practices to design a clean RESTful API:

1. Use nouns but no verbs

For an easy understanding use this structure for every resource:

Resource	GET read	POST create	PUT update	DELETE
/cars	Returns a list of cars	Create a new ticket	Bulk update of cars	Delete all cars
/cars/711	Returns a specific car	Method not allowed (405)	Updates a specific ticket	Deletes a specific ticket

Do not use verbs:

```
/getAllCars  
/createNewCar  
/deleteAllRedCars
```

2. GET method and query parameters should not alter the state

Use **PUT**, **POST** and **DELETE** methods instead of the **GET** method to alter the state.

Do not use **GET** for state changes:

```
GET /users/711?activate or  
GET /users/711/activate
```

3. Use plural nouns

Do not mix up singular and plural nouns. Keep it simple and use only plural nouns for all resources.

```
/cars instead of /car  
/users instead of /user  
/products instead of /product  
/settings instead of /setting
```

4. Use sub-resources for relations

If a resource is related to another resource use subresources.

```
GET /cars/711/drivers/ Returns a list of drivers for car 711  
GET /cars/711/drivers/4 Returns driver #4 for car 711
```

5. Use HTTP headers for serialization formats

Both, client and server, need to know which format is used for the communication. The format has to be specified in the HTTP-Header.

Content-Type defines the request format.

Accept defines a list of acceptable response formats.

6. Use HATEOAS

Hypermedia **a**s the **E**ngine of **A**pplication **S**tate is a principle that hypertext links should be used to create a better navigation through the API.

```
01 {  
02   "id": 711,  
03   "manufacturer": "bmw",  
04   "model": "X5",  
05   "seats": 5,  
06   "drivers": [  
07     {  
08       "id": "23",  
09       "name": "Stefan Jauker",  
10       "links": [  
11         {  
12           "rel": "self",  
13           "href": "/api/v1/drivers/23"  
14         }  
15       ]  
16     }  
17   ]  
18 }
```

7. Provide filtering, sorting, field selection and paging for collections

Filtering:

Use a unique query parameter for all fields or a query language for filtering.

```
GET /cars?color=red Returns a list of red cars  
GET /cars?seats<=2 Returns a list of cars with a maximum of 2 seats
```

Sorting:

Allow ascending and descending sorting over multiple fields.

```
GET /cars?sort=-manufacturer,+model
```

This returns a list of cars sorted by descending manufacturers and ascending models.

Field selection

Mobile clients display just a few attributes in a list. They don't need all attributes of a resource. Give the API consumer the ability to choose returned fields. This will also reduce the network traffic and speed up the usage of the API.

```
GET /cars?fields=manufacturer,model,id,color
```

Paging

Use limit and offset. It is flexible for the user and common in leading databases. The default should be limit=20 and offset=0

```
GET /cars?offset=10&limit=5
```

To send the total entries back to the user use the custom HTTP header: X-Total-Count.

Links to the next or previous page should be provided in the HTTP header link as well. It is important to follow this link header values instead of constructing your own URLs.

```
Link: <https://blog.mwaysolutions.com/sample/api/v1/cars?offset=15&limit=5>  
<https://blog.mwaysolutions.com/sample/api/v1/cars?offset=50&limit=3>; rel=  
<https://blog.mwaysolutions.com/sample/api/v1/cars?offset=0&limit=5>; rel="  
<https://blog.mwaysolutions.com/sample/api/v1/cars?offset=5&limit=5>; rel="
```

8. Version your API

Make the API Version mandatory and do not release an

unversioned API. Use a simple ordinal number and avoid dot notation such as 2.5.

We are using the url for the API versioning starting with the letter „v“

```
/blog/api/v1
```

9. Handle Errors with HTTP status codes

It is hard to work with an API that ignores error handling. Pure returning of a HTTP 500 with a stacktrace is not very helpful.

Use HTTP status codes

The HTTP standard provides over 70 status codes to describe the return values. We don't need them all, but there should be used at least a mount of 10.

200 – OK – Everything is working

201 – OK – New resource has been created

204 – OK – The resource was successfully deleted

304 – Not Modified – The client can use cached data

400 – Bad Request – The request was invalid or cannot be served. The exact error should be explained in the error payload. E.g. „The JSON is not valid“

401 – Unauthorized – The request requires an user authentication

403 – Forbidden – The server understood the request, but is refusing it or the access is not allowed.

404 – Not found – There is no resource behind the URI.

422 – Unprocessable Entity – Should be used if the server cannot process the entity, e.g. if an image cannot be formatted or mandatory fields are missing in the payload.

500 – Internal Server Error – API developers should avoid this error. If an error occurs in the global catch block, the stacktrace should be logged and not returned as response.

Use error payloads

All exceptions should be mapped in an error payload. Here is an example how a JSON payload should look like.

```
01 {  
02   "errors": [  
03     {  
04       "userMessage": "Sorry, the requested resource  
does not exist",  
05       "internalMessage": "No car found in the  
database",  
06       "code": 34,  
07       "more info": "http://dev.mwaysolutions.com  
/blog/api/v1/errors/12345"  
08     }  
09   ]  
10 }
```


10. Allow overriding HTTP method

Some proxies support only **POST** and **GET** methods. To support a RESTful API with these limitations, the API needs a way to override the HTTP method.

Use the custom HTTP Header **X-HTTP-Method-Override** to override the POST Method.

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WRITTEN BY [STEFAN JAUKER](#) ON 05/06/2014 IN [CODE](#), [SHOW ALL](#).

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Share  Favorite ★**Simon Wood** · 5 months ago

You might want to change section 8. Versioning should ideally be in the header not in the path. If you can get it into the header then the URI for a resource does not change between versions which is what you would want.

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**Trappiste** → **Simon Wood** · 2 months ago

That's not that simple...in a RESTful API, one URL == one resource. Different API versions implies different resource representations, that can be considered as different resources...

I'm actually not a big fan of header controlled APIs because you have to know, for each option, whether it's controlled by a header or the URL or POST data. That means that you have to spend more time reading the doc (HATEOAS APIs aim at being usable without reading any doc).

Header controlled APIs are harder to use. If you want your API to be popular, the best is to keep it as simple as possible...

2 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▸

**Simon Wood** → **Trappiste** · 2 months ago

The main reason I don't like like the version in the URI is because each URI == One resource.

If I have an API that returns pens <http://domain.com/pens/> and I can get pen 10 <http://domain.com/pens/10/> I now change the interface of my API, I change the a key in the JSON reply. This is a breaking change so I now need to update the version, but pen 10 is still pen 10. There is only one pen 10 and its URI is <http://domain.com/pens/10/>. If version was in the URI I would have two pen 10's but in the real/physical world there is only one pen 10. It is the interface to this pen that has changed so using the header makes sense.

If I talk you in english, it is you. If I then change interface and talk to you in spanish, it is still you. You have not change just the interface I am using to communicate with you. You would need a single never changing URI.

I agree with you for beginners version in the URI is easier to

