How Ruby on Rails Works: (all notes taken from Professors Armando Fox and Dave Patterson's Saas Text Book Summer 2013):

Ruby on Rails uses the MVC (Model-View-Controller) design pattern which associates a controller and a set of views with each model type. Models implement business logic. Views present information to the user and allow the user to interact with the app. Controllers mediate the interaction between views and models. Every user action such as clicking a link button, submitting a fill-in form, using drag and drop are eventually handled by some controller action, which will consult models as needed to obtain information and generate a view in response. Models are concerned with the data manipulated by the application: how to store it, how to operate on it and how to change it. MVC apps typically have a model for each type of entity manipulated by the app.

In the RottenPotatoes app for this class, there is only a movie model but others could be added later. Since models deal with the app's data, they contain code that communicates with the storage tier.

Views are presented to the user and contain information about the models with which users can interact. They serve as the interface between the system's users and it's data. In Rotten Potatoes, you can list movies, add movies by clicking on links or buttons in the views. The one movie model in RottenPotatoes is associated with a variety of views. One view lists all movies, another view shows the details of a particular movie, and other views appear when creating new movies or editing existing ones.

Controllers mediate the interaction in both directions, when the user interacts with a view by clicking something on a web page, a specific controller action corresponding to that user activity is invoked. Each controller corresponds to one model. Each controller action is handled by a particular Ruby method within that controller. The controller can ask the model to retrieve or modify information. Depending on the results of doing this, the controller decides what view will be presented next to the user, and supplies that view with any necessary information. Since RottenPotatoes has only one model (Movies), it also has only one controller, the Movies controller. Actions defined in that controller can handle each type of user interaction with any movie view (clicking on links or buttons, for example), and contain necessary logic to obtain model data to render any of the movie views.

Saas Apps have always been view-centric and have always relied on a persistence tier, which stores data in a database. Rails choice of MVC as underlying architecture seemed an obvious fit to the designers but other choices were possible.

Apps need to store and manipulate persistent data in a database, file or other persistent storage location. They need a way to convert between the data structures or objects manipulated by the app code and the way data is stored. For RottenPotatoes, the only persistent data is about movies. Movie attributes are: title, release date, MPAA rating, short “blurb”, and a summary. There are different issues with storing attributes. Attributes separated by commas in a file run into issues when movie title has a comma and is not fixed by double quoting it, since some titles have a double quote within it. It is tricky and requires writing code to convert an in-memory object to our storage representation, called “marshalling”, or “serializing the object” and vice versa.

Structured storage systems allow you to simply specify the desired structure of stored objects rather than writing explicit code to create structure, and in some cases specify relationships connecting objects of different types.

Relational database management (RDBMS's) from the early 1970's are elegant structured storage systems whose design was based on formalism for representing structure and relationships. In brief, it stores collections of tables, each of which stores entities with common sets of attributes. One row equals one entity, columns equal the attributes for the entity, and the “id” column is the primary key, permanent and unique.

For Rails, primary keys use common convention of assigning integers in increasing order. Rails uses the “Acitve Record Architectural Pattern”. This pattern is a single instance of the model class, one movie. It corresponds to a single row in a RDBMS table. The model object has built-in **behaviors** that directly operate on the database representation of the object. These behaviors have the acronym **CRUD**. **C** is for “**C**reating a new row in table, representing the object”. **R** is for “**R**ead an existing row into a single instance.” **U** is for “**U**pdate an existing row with new attribute values from a modified object instance.” **D** is for “**D**elete a row (destroying the object's data forever).”

Adding an ability for movie goers to review their favorite movies will create a one-to-many relationship, or association between a moviegoer and her reviews.

Active Record exploits existing RDBMS mechanisms to make it easy to implement associations on the in-memory objects.

The way Ruby on Rails works is: Each incoming HTTP request must be mapped to the appropriate controller method and this mapping is called a route. An HTTP request has both a URL (URI) and an HTTP Method. An HTTP method is either a function or the HTTP method of a request. For Ruby on Rails that uses a routes file to map the HTTP request to the appropriate controller method, method means HTTP verb associated with request (GET, POST, PUT, DELETE) and the controller action to the application code method or function that handles the request.

This “service-oriented-architecture” is a consistent way to map requests to actions. Roy Fielding's idea was to call it “**REST**” for “**Re**presentational **S**tate **T**ransfer”, which identified various entities manipulated by a web app as resources. It designs routes so any HTTP request would contain all information necessary to identify both a particular resource and the action to be performed on it.

So REST was a powerful organizing principle for Saas apps. The app designer must think carefully about exact conditions or assumptions each request depends on in order to be self-contained. They also had to decide how each type of entity manipulated by the app can be represented as a “resource” on which various operations can be performed. Apps designed with this guideline are said to expose RESTful APIs (Application Programming Interfaces). URLs (URIs) that map to particular actions are said to be RESTful APIs.

Rails' route mappings are generated by code in the file routes.rb. Rails does NOT mandate routes to be RESTful, but it's built-in support for routing assumes REST by default.

“Rake” runs maintenance tasks defined in RottenPotatoes' Rakefile.rake.

Example: route GET /movies/8

would for example, match 2nd row where :id = 8, the primary key of a model instance movie.

Example: route GET /movies

would for example match the first row, requesting a list of all the movies, an Index action.

Example: route POST /movies

would for example match 4rth row and create a new movie entry in the database. POST /movies route does not specify an 'id' because a new moview won't have an id until after it's created.

Index and Create actions have the same URL (URI) but different HTTP methods (GET, POST) which makes them distinct routes.

Summary of Rake Routes: show routes recognized by RottenPotatoes and the CRUD action reprsented by each route.

Operation on Resource Rails Controller Action (CRUD Method and URL (URI)

action represented by route) (when request matches URL and

HTTP method)

Index (list) movies Index GET /movies

Read (show) existing movie Show GET /movie/:id

Display fill-in form for New GET /movies/new

new movie

Create new movie from Create POST /movies

filled in form

Display form to edit Edit GET /movies/:id/edit

existing movie

Update movie from Update PUT /movies/:id

fill-in form

Destroy existing movie Destroy DELETE /movies/:id

This RESTful interface simplifies SOA (Systems-Oriented-Architecture) participation. If every request is self-contained, interactions between services don't need to establish an on-going session, as many web apps do when interacting with a web browser.

WEBrick is a mini-server that has just enough functionality to let 1 user at a time interact with your web app client running in the browser. A real web site would use a production server (with production level clients – millions of people) which can either be deployed on 100's of computers serving many copies of the same site to millions of users.

Network Protocol: a set of communication rules on which agents participating in a network agree – in this case – the agents are the web clients (like Firefox, any browser) and web servers (like WebBrick or Apache). The browsers and web servers communicate using the HTTP (hyper-text-transfer-protocol). HTTP relies on TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol) / (Internet Protocol) which allows a pair of agents to communicate with an ordered sequence of bytes or arbitrary character strings. In the TCP/IP network, each computer has an IP address of 4 bytes (IPv4) or 16 bytes (IPv6). The Domain Name Service (DNS) is used if you do not want to use the 4 byte number IP address. The browser clients automatically contact the DNS server to look up the site name typed in the address bar. For our debug situation in this class, we ran the rails server (WEBrick server) on our local computer, so we used “localhost” so that the browser client knew that the server it was contacting was running locally on our own computer, rather than having to contact it over the internet. Each network interface device has its own IP address. Note that the difference between HTTP and HTTPS is that HTTPS is the secure version of HTTP in that it uses public key cryptography to encrypt (encode) communication between HTTP clients and servers, so that an eavesdropper only sees gibberish. Our WEBrick rails mini-server does not use HTTPS.

The port number :3000 after localhose represents a port number where multiple agents (clients, servers) on a network can be running at the same IP address.

TCP/IP uses port numbers from 1 to 65535 to distinguish different network agents at the same IP address. All protocols based on TCP/IP including HTTP must specify both the host and the port number when opening a connection.

Example: localhost:3000/movies

locahost = local computer instead of remote host

3000 = server is listening on port 3000, waiting for browsers to contact it

Note: if port number not specified, defaults to port 80 for HTTP

IANA (Internet Assignment Numbers Authority) assigns default port numbers for various protocols and manages the top-level or “root” zone of DNS.

URL = Uniform Resource Locator

URI = Uniform Resource Indentifier

URL and URI: begin with communication scheme by which information should be retrieved

followed by hostname

optional port number

and a resource on host user wants to retrieve - anything that can be delivered to the browser

Example HTTP Requests:

GET [http://srch.com:80/main/search?q=cloud&lang=en#top](http://srch.com:80/main/search?q=cloud&lang=en" \l "top)

GET = HTTP method

http = scheme

srch.com = hostname

80 = port number

/main/search = resource path

?q=cloud&lang=en ----- these are the query terms: “key = value” separated by and or colon

#top = fragment

POST <http://localhost:3000/movies/3>

POST = HTTP method

http = scheme

localhost = host name

3000 = port number

/movies/3 = resource path

HTTP = stateless protocol which means every request is independent of every previous request

Applications keep track of state (such as have you logged in yet?, what step in the check out process are you on?) and must have its own mechanisms for keeping track of this state, since HTTP protocol is stateless and does not do it.

Cookies associate a particular browser client user with information held at the server corresponding to that user's session, but it's the browser's responsibility, not HTTP's or the Saas apps responsibility, to make sure the right cookies are included with each HTTP request.

Stateless protocols simplify server design at the expense of application design.

Rails framework shields you from this complexity.

Cookies are used to establish that 2 independent requests actually originated from the same user's browser, and can therefore be thought of as part of a session.

During the first site visit, the server includes a long string (up to 4 kbytes) with set-cookie: “HTTP response header”. The brower's responsibility (client) is to include this string with the cookie: “HTTP request header” on subsequent requests to that site.

The cookie string has enough information in it for the server to associate the request with the same user\_session.

For our Saas assignments, the RottenPotatoes Rails Server activates WEBrick, and this program waits for clients to make a request and then provides a reply. WEBrick waits to be contacted by the client web browser such as FireFox. It routes the browser's requests to the RottenPotatoes application. The web client FireFox requests RottenPotatoes home page from a web server (WEBrick). WEBrick obtains content from the RottenPotatoes app and sends the content back to FireFox. FireFox displays the content and closes the HTTP connection.

The web is primarily “client pull”, client server architecture because the client initiates all interactions – HTTP servers can only wait for clients to contact them. Because HTTP was designed as a request-reply protocol, only clients can initiate anything.

The evolving standard (including web sockets and HTML5) have some support for allowing the server to push updated content to the client. In contrast, true server push architectures such as text messaging on cell phones, allow the server to initiate a connection to the client to “wake it up” when the new information is available, but these cannot use HTTP. Early web criticisms was that the web's architecture was pure request-reply protocol, ruling out such push based applications. In practice, high efficiency server software supports creating web pages that frequently poll (check in with) the server to receive updates, giving the user the illusion of a push-based application even without the features proposed in websockets and HTML5.

The manner in which HTML (Hyper-Text-Markup-Language) elements correspond to different things on a web page served by a Saas app is as follows. On the Web Developer tool bar, a FireFox add-on, “Make Visible Source” of: <http://localhost:3000/movies> followed by “View Source” shows the raw bytes that come back from the server when this page is requested.

The mark-up language is how the text fits into the page structure. The tags are mark-up of the text content. So for the example web page above:

<!DOCTYPE html>

<html>

<head>

<title>Rotten Potatoes!<\title>

<link href=”/assets/application.ces?body=1” media = “screen” rel=”stylesheet” type=”text/css”/>

<script src=”/assets/jquery.js?body=1” type = “text/javascript”></script>

<script src=”/assets/jquery ujs.js?body=1” type = “text/javascript”></script>

<script src=”/assets/application.js?body=1” type = “text/javascript”></script>

<meta content=”authenticity\_token” name=”cerf-param”/>

<meta content=”pc/1HZ5CSVqAtgEgmiHzFAH6HzEYIynONcZ7kUKP4=” name = “cerf-token”/>

<\head>

<body>

<h1 class='title'>Rotten Potatoes!/h1>

<div id='main'>

<h1>All Movies</h1>

<table id='movies'>

<thead>

<tr>

<th>Movie Title</th>

<th>Rating</th>

<th>Release Date</th>

<th>More Info</th>

</tr>

</thead>

<tbody>

<tr>

<td>Inception</td>

<td>PG-13</td>

<td>2010-07-16 00:00:00 UTC</td>

<td><a href=”/movies/4”>More About Inception</a></td>

</tr>

<tr>

<td>It's Complicated</td>

<td>R</td>

<td>2009-12-25 00:00:00 UTC</td>

<td><a href=”/movies/5”>More About It's Complicated</a></td>

</tr>

</tbody>

</table>

<a href = “/movies/new”> Add New Movie”</a>

</div>

</body>

</html>

How the Ruby app code corresponds to the HTML page:

In the above HTML page, “Rotten Potatoes!” is an HTML element with </title> which is not a self-closing tag. The <link href=..../> is an example of a self-closing tag. In Rails, tags can be nested and Rails automatically indents so it is not required. In the above HTML page, the nested tags are the nested table tags, table rows <tr>, table headers <th> for the table's column headers, and the nested table entries that fill that table up with the <tr> table row with <td> table data, that contains the strings to enter for each of those column header attributes for this table. <th> is a table head element and <tr> is a table row element. The <a href... element is a hyper-link, an attribute, and it's content is what the user sees. h1.title in the ruby app code is an element whose class element has a specific value and corresponds in the <body> section to <h1 class = 'title'>. In the <div id='main'> tag, div#main corresponds to this in the ruby app code. <h1> is a header element. <table id='movies'> is a table element which has an id value = 'movies', and id is the id attribute. In the ruby app code, table#movies corresponds to the tag <table id='movies'>, an element whose id is movies.

HTML (Hyper-text markup language): a markup language combines text with mark-up (annotations about text) in a way that makes it easy to syntactically distinguish between the two.

<p> <\p> - open tag, end tag

<br> <\> - open tag, self-closing tag

<a href = “http://....”> - opening tag with attribute

<brclear = “both”/> - line break that clears both left and right margins

The use of angle brackets for tags comes from SGML (Standardized Generalized Markup Language), a codified standardization of IBM's 1960's General Markup language used for encoding computer readable project documents.

HTML5 – the current version when I took this course in summer 2013 – is a confusing mess of terminology surronding the lineage of HTML. It includes features from both of its predecessors (HTML Version 1-4) and XHTML (eXtended HTML) which is a subset of XML, to both represent data and to describe other markup languages.

XML is a common data representation for exchanging information between 2 services in a service-oriented-architecture. This is used when we use Rotten Potatoes to retrieve movie information from a separate movie database service.

Note that not all browsers support all versions of HTML, and the text book we used for this class in summer 2013 used HTML5 except when otherwise noted.

The tags of particular interest to us in this class were:

HTML: id, class: figure heavily into connecting HTML structure of a page with its visual appearance, text and graphics.

Inspecting the ID and Class Attributes:

CSS uses div#name to indicate a div element whose id is name and div.name to indicate a div element with class name.

Objective: in a web browser, if you hover the mouse over the element with the “Display Element Info.” turned on in the Web Development Bar, you can see whether that element has class or id attribute attached to it. In Web Developer Information, use “Make Visible” and “View Source” so that bytes returned from the server can be viewed for browser to format and display. When you also select “Display element information”, Firefox draws a red box around the element, and hovering the mouse over these can show you the nesting of elements in the Web Development Bar.

Such as: <th>nesting: html> body> div#main > table#movies > thead > tr > th

would be what you see when you hovered the mouse over Movie Title, shown in the above HTML code, table header section of the web page.

Note: Only one element in an HTML document can have a given ID, where as many elements (even of different tag types) can share the same class.

All 3 aspects of an element, it's tag type, id (if it has one), and its class attributes (if it has any), can be used to identify an element as a candidate for visual formatting.

The Cascading-Style-Sheet (CSS) stylesheet we used gives more information about attributes. It allows us to associate “visual styling” instructions with HTML elements by using the elements' classes and ID's. The 4 basic mechanisms by which a selector in a CSS file can match an HTML element: tag name, class, ID, hierarchy. If multiple selectors match a given element, the rules for which properties to apply are complex, so most designers try to avoid such ambiguities by keeping CSS simple.

To see a web page without CSS styling, select in the Web Developer Tool Bar:

CSS > Disable styles > All Styles

and the web page will be displayed with all CSS formatting turned off, and shows the extent CSS can separate visual appearance from logical structure.

CSS Selectors: identify elements to be styled:

Selector: What is Selected:

h1 any h1 element

div#message the div element whose ID is message

\_\_\_.red any element with class red

div.red, h1 div element with class red, or any h1

div#message h1 An h1 element that's a child of (inside of) div#message

a.lnk an element with class lnk

a.lnk:hover an element with class lnk, when hovered over

CSS Attributes: a few of the many attributes for elements:

Attribute: Example Values:

font-family “Times, serif”

font-weight bold

font-size 14pt, 125%, 12px

font-style italic

color black

margin 4px

background color red, #c2eed6 (RGB values)

border 1px solid blue

CSS Attributes Continued from above: a few of the many attributes for elements:

Attribute: Example Values:

text-align right

text-decoration underline

vertical-align middle

padding 1cm

In the above HTML page: In the Firefox browser Web Developer Menu, select “View Source” so source code is fed to us and “Information”->”Display Element Infomation” and move the window element menu out of the way. You can now hover over the web page element and see the element type tag, whether it has an id or class or attribute.

<link href=”/assets/application.ces?body=1” media = “screen” rel=”stylesheet” type=”text/css”/>

.title means an h1.title whose *class* attribute has the value title (when you hover the mouse on the web page, you see: html> body> h1.title)

If you hover the mouse over “Movie Title” on the web page you see:

table#movies is a table whose ID attribute has the value movies:

(html> body > div#main > table#movies > thead> tr> th)

How CSS uses this information to style a web page:

In the above <link href= HTML element, rel=stylesheet says to load stylesheet at href directory URL pointer, and use that information to control visual display of page. If you click on that URI / URL, it takes you to that stylesheet.

A CSS Style sheet from our above HTML web page example:

html, body {

margin : 0;

padding : 0;

background : white;

color : DarkSlateGrey;

font-family : Tahoma, Verdana, sans-serif;

font-size : 10 pt;

}

div#main {

margin : 0;

padding : 0 20px 20px;

}

a {

background : transparent;

color : maroon;

text-decoration : underline;

font-weight : bold;

}

h1 {

color : maroon;

font-size : 150%;

font-style : italic;

display : block;

width : 100%;

border-bottom : lpx solid DarkSlateGrey;

}

h1.title {

margin : 0 0 len;

padding : 10px;

background-color : orange;

color : white;

border-bottom : 4px solid gold;

font-size : 2cm

font-style : normal;

}

table#movies {

margin : 10px;

border-collapse : collapse;

width : 100%;

border-bottom : 2px solid black;

}

table#movies th {

border : 2px solid white;

font-weight : bold;

background-color : wheat;

}

table#movies th, table#movies td {

padding : 4px;

text-align : left;

}

#notice #warning {

background : rosybrown;

margin : 1cm 0;

padding : 4px;

}

form label {

display : block;

line-height : 25 px;

font-weight : bold;

color : maroon;

}

In the above HTML web page and the associated CSS stylesheet shown above:

“All Movies” on the web page will match all h1's in the document in CSS stylesheet.

h1 {

color : maroon;

font-size : 150%;

font-style : italic;

display : block;

width : 100%;

border-bottom : lpx solid DarkSlateGrey;

}

To make match more specific in other ways:

html > body> div main –demarcates a logical part of the page

One affect: unlike the “Rotten Potatoes” header that extends to the edge of a page, the main body of page has 20 pixels of padding on either side with this extra in the CSS stylesheet:

This is an example of how to use an ID attribute to make match more specific:

div#main {

margin : 0;

padding : 0 20px 20px;

}

<body>

<h1 class='title'>Rotten Potatoes!/h1>

<div id='main'>

<h1>All Movies</h1>

An example of how to use a class attribute to make match more specific:

h1.title in CSS stylesheet has different color and styling:

h1.title {

margin : 0 0 len;

padding : 10px;

background-color : orange;

color : white;

border-bottom : 4px solid gold;

font-size : 2cm

font-style : normal;

}

These are examples of nesting.

table#movies th, table#movies td {

padding : 4px;

text-align : left;

}

#notice #warning {

background : rosybrown;

margin : 1cm 0;

padding : 4px;

}

form label {

display : block;

line-height : 25 px;

font-weight : bold;

color : maroon;

}

Movie details match the table#movies th, table#movies td in web page.