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Chapter 6. Generating the Server Response: HTTP Status Codes

Topics in This Chapter

- Format of the HTTP response
- How to set status codes
- What the status codes are good for
- Shortcut methods for redirection and error pages
- A servlet that redirects users to browser-specific pages
- A front end to various search engines

As we saw in the previous chapter, a request from a browser or other client consists of an HTTP command (usually `GET` or `POST`), zero or more request headers (one or more in HTTP 1.1, since `Host` is required), a blank line, and, only in the case of `POST` requests, some query data. A typical request looks like the following.

```
GET /servlet/SomeName HTTP/1.1
Host: ...
Header2: ...
...
HeaderN:
(Blank Line)
```

When a Web server responds to a request, the response typically consists of a status line, some response headers, a blank line, and the document. A typical response looks like this:

```
HTTP/1.1 200 OK
Content-Type: text/html
Header2: ...
...
HeaderN: ...
(Blank Line)
<!DOCTYPE ...>
<HTML>
<HEAD>...</HEAD>
<BODY>
...
</BODY></HTML>
```

The status line consists of the HTTP version (`HTTP/1.1` in the preceding example), a status code (an integer; `200` in the example), and a very short message corresponding to the status code (`OK` in the example). In most cases, the headers are optional except for `Content-Type`, which specifies the MIME type of the document that follows. Although most responses contain a document, some don't. For example, responses to `HEAD` requests should never include a document, and various status codes essentially indicate failure or redirection (and thus either don't include a document or include only a short error-message document).

Servlets can perform a variety of important tasks by manipulating the status line and the response headers. For example, they can forward the user to other sites; indicate that the attached document is an image, Adobe Acrobat file, or HTML file; tell the user that a password is required to access the document; and so forth. This chapter summarizes the most important status codes and describes what can be accomplished with them; the following chapter discusses the response headers.

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