This series of Python scripts explores the crucial practice of fetching internet resources using the ‘urllib’ module.

Urllib: Fetching Internet Resources Using The urllib Package.

urllib.request is a Python module for fetching URLs (Uniform Resource Locators). It offers a very simple interface, in the form of the urlopen function. This is capable of fetching URLs using a variety of different protocols. It also offers a slightly more complex interface for handling common situations - like basic authentication, cookies, proxies and so on. These are provided by objects called handlers and openers.

urllib.request supports fetching URLs for many “URL schemes” (identified by the string before the ":" in URL - for example "ftp" is the URL scheme of "ftp://python.org/") using their associated network protocols (e.g. FTP, HTTP). This tutorial focuses on the most common case, HTTP.

For straightforward situations urlopen is very easy to use. But as soon as you encounter errors or non-trivial cases when opening HTTP URLs, you will need some understanding of the HyperText Transfer Protocol. The most comprehensive and authoritative reference to HTTP is RFC 2616. This is a technical document and not intended to be easy to read. This HOWTO aims to illustrate using urllib, with enough detail about HTTP to help you through. It is not intended to replace the urllib.request docs, but is supplementary to them.

Also explored is the Python ‘ftplib’ module, used as an FTP protocol client.

This module defines the class FTP and a few related items. The FTP class implements the client side of the FTP protocol. You can use this to write Python programs that perform a variety of automated FTP jobs, such as mirroring other FTP servers. It is also used by the module urllib.request to handle URLs that use FTP.