



HTTP Client C & REST API



Duțu Alin Călin

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	2
1.1	Context	2
1.2	Objectives	2
2	Proposed Solution	3
2.1	Architecture	3
2.2	Communication	4
2.2.1	Endpoints	4
2.2.2	JWT Token	6
3	Implementation Details	7
3.1	Commands	7
3.2	Project files	8
3.3	Implementation description	9
3.4	Main Flow	11
3.5	Testing	11
4	Conclusions	12
	Bibliography	12

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Web apps represent a meaningful percentage of today's modern applications. Most of these, despite their complexity, are designed based on the client-server model, a classic architectural design that divides tasks between servers and clients. To understand how the client-server model works, it is required to comprehend how the HTTP protocol works.

1.2 Objectives

The purpose of this program is to create an HTTP client programmed in C language that can interact with a server using the REST API. The following objectives are covered upon implementing the client:

- Understand how the communication mechanism of the HTTP protocol works in the background
- Interact with a REST API server
- Understand the concepts used in web development such as session, JSON, and JWT tokens
- Make use of external libraries to manipulate JSON objects, which are crucial for communication with a REST API server.

2 PROPOSED SOLUTION

This project aims to implement a web client that can successfully interact with a server. Despite that, the de facto technology used for designing a client is the triad: HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, a more familiar approach using C language was chosen to fathom the concepts and to approach the protocol from a lower level.

2.1 Architecture

Looking from a general point of view, there can be 2 entities that perform different actions and interactions to ensure communication:



Figure 1: Application architecture ¹

The server exposes an API (Application Programmable Interface) of type REST (Representational State Transfer). This is like a black box that exposes a series of entries represented by HTTP routes called endpoints. Following the HTTP requests, the server executes an action. From the project's perspective, the server simulates an online library and it is already implemented.

The client is a program developed in C language that accepts commands from the keyboard and sends requests to the server depending on the command type. This program aims to work as closely as a UI interface for the virtual library.

¹<https://www.flaticon.com/icons>. Icons created by RawPixel

2.2 Communication

The REST API protocol secures the connection between the client and the server. The client will send all the commands via HTTP requests, while the server will process them accordingly as soon as its endpoints receive them.

2.2.1 Endpoints

Account registry

- Access Route: POST /api/v1/tema/auth/register
- Payload type: application/json
- Payload:

```
{  
    "username": String,  
    "password": String  
}
```

- Returns an error if the username already exists

Authentication

- Access Route: POST /api/v1/tema/auth/login
- Payload type: application/json
- Payload:

```
{  
    "username": String,  
    "password": String  
}
```

- Returns cookie session
- Returns an error message if the credentials are not valid

Access request in the library

- Access Route: GET /api/v1/tema/library/access
- It has to be demonstrated that the user is authenticated
- Returns a JWT token, which demonstrates the access to the library
- Returns an error message if the user doesn't demonstrate that he is authenticated

Visualizing a summary of information about all the books

- Access Route: GET /api/v1/tema/library/books
- It has to be demonstrated that the user has access to the library
- Returns a list of JSON objects:

```
{  
  id: Number,  
  title: String  
}
```

- Returns an error message if the user doesn't demonstrate that he has access

Visualizing details about a book

- Access Route: GET /api/v1/tema/library/books/:bookId. ":bookId" will be replaced with the ID of the book
- It has to be demonstrated that the user is authenticated
- Returns a JSON object:

```
{  
  "id": Number,  
  "title": String,  
  "author": String,  
  "publisher": String,  
  "genre": String,  
  "page_count": Number  
}
```

- Returns an error message if the user doesn't demonstrate that he has access
- Returns an error message if the book ID is invalid

Adding a book

- Access Route: POST /api/v1/tema/library/books
- Payload Type: application/json
- It has to be demonstrated that the user has access to the library
- Returns a JSON object:

```
{  
  "title": String,  
  "author": String,  
  "genre": String,  
}
```

```
    "page_count": Number,  
    "publisher": String  
}
```

- Returns an error message if the user doesn't demonstrate that he has access
- Returns an error message if either the added information is incomplete or it doesn't respect the format

Deleting a book

- Access Route: DELETE /api/v1/tema/library/books/:bookId. ":bookId" will be replaced with the ID of the book
- It has to be demonstrated that the user has access to the library
- Returns an error message if the user doesn't demonstrate that he has access
- Returns an error message if the request is invalid

Logout

- Access Route: GET /api/v1/tema/auth/logout
- It has to be demonstrated that the user is authenticated
- Returns an error message if the user doesn't demonstrate that he is authenticated

2.2.2 JWT Token

JWT tokens are used to ensure communication integrity between clients and servers. To create one, the information is converted into binary and signed to make sure that an attacker won't modify the information from packets. To send the token to the server, it is required to add the word **Bearer** and set it in the **Authorization** header.

3 IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

The implementation mainly consists of an application implemented in C++ that must interpret commands from the keyboard to interact with the server. When the client receives 1 command, it will create the required JSON objects, integrate them into a specific HTTP request, send it, wait until a response is received, and then show the response. The process shall repeat until the exit command is called.

3.1 Commands

The input for each command looks as follows:

Register

```
register
username=<username>
password=<password>
```

Login

```
login
username=<username>
password=<password>
```

Enter library

```
enter_library
```

Get books

```
get_books
```


Get book

```
get_book  
id=<id>
```

Add book

```
add_book  
title=<title>  
author=<author>  
genre=<genre>  
publisher=<publisher>  
page_count=<page_count>
```

Delete book

```
delete_book  
id=<id>
```

Logout

```
logout
```

Exit

```
exit
```

3.2 Project files

1. Files from PCOM labs [1]
 - buffer.c
 - buffer.h
 - helpers.c
 - helpers.h
 - request.c (modified version)
 - request.h (modified version)
2. Files from the Parson open-source library [2]

- parson.c
- parson.h

3. Other files

- client.c
- Makefile
- README

3.3 Implementation description

The main implementation is found in the client.c, request.c and request.h files.

1. Request.c and Request.h

These files were provided by the PCOM labs[1]. Modifications regarding header and cookie processing were added to adapt to the desired functionality. In addition, an implementation to process DELETE requests has been added and it requires a URL, Host, other necessary headers, and a newline to the message. In request.h function signatures are found, while the implementation of these is found in the request.c.

2. Client.c

In this file is the main implementation. At initialization, it makes contact with the server side by merging the server IP with the connection port. When the connection is established, the program lets the user execute new commands to interact with the server through HTTP requests. These requests are processed using the following functions:

- register - Called when the user prompts "register". The function processes a POST request by creating a JSON object using the provided username and password. Additionally, when the request is going to be sent to the server, it will wait for the server's response and either show a relevant message or the response itself.
- login - Called when the user prompts "login". It creates a POST request in the same manner as the register command with the notable difference of saving the session cookie in case of a successful login.
- enter_library - Called when user prompts "enter_library". It sends a simple GET request containing the session cookie. Upon receiving a successful response, the JWT authorization token provided by the server will be received.
- get_books - Called when user prompts "get_books". It processes a GET request with the saved authorization token and shows the list of books available in a JSON

format upon success.

- `get_book` - Called when "`get_book`" is prompted. It processes a GET request with the JWT token as a header and the book ID provided by the user in the URL request. The result upon success is the book information in JSON format.
- `add_book` - Called when "`add_book`" is prompted. It processes a POST request with the authorization token as a header and the information about the new book provided by the user in JSON format and shows the response message.
- `delete_book` - Called when "`delete_book`" is prompted. It processes a DELETE request with the authorization token as a header and the book ID provided by the user in the request URL. Upon receiving the response from the server, its message will be shown.
- `logout` - Called when "`logout`" is prompted. It processes a GET request which contains the session cookie. Upon success, the tokens will be deleted from the program's memory and a corresponding message will be shown.

For executing multiple commands simultaneously, due to the technical difficulties met, it has been decided upon the end of processing a request, regardless of the output, to close and reopen the client socket. The exception to the rule is represented by the exit command which will only close the socket.

The Parson library made a major contribution to the process of serializing and deserializing the objects used in the client's requests and server's replies due to its converting functions that can be easily integrated into the program.

3.4 Main Flow

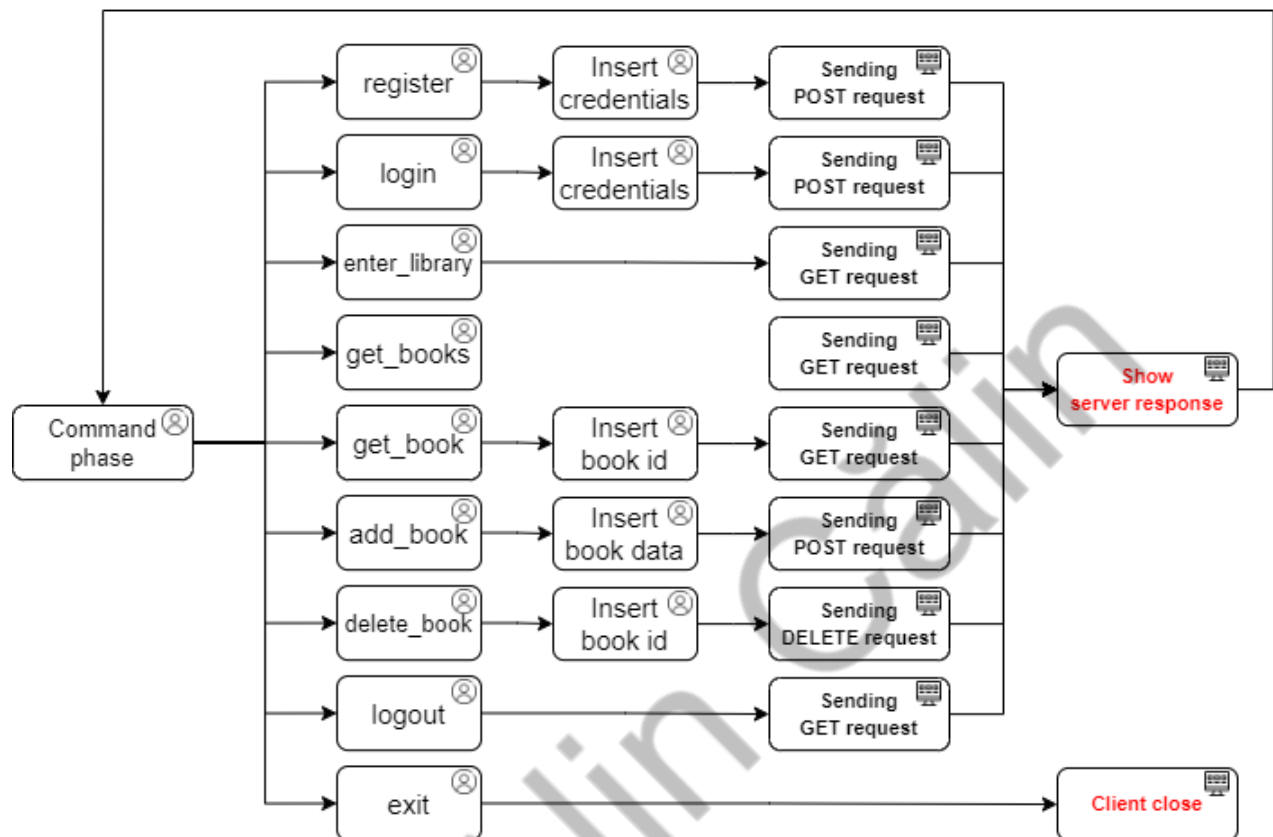


Figure 2: Main Flow diagram

3.5 Testing

For testing the proposed solution, the following methods have been used:

- Postman - Used for testing the requests provided by the client
- Manual testing - Used for testing the program's behavior in all the possible conditions.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this project proposes an HTTP client implemented in C that can interact with a server using the REST API to understand the basic mechanics used by HTTP by implementing communication with a server based on REST API and how is data represented in the communication between these entities from a client's perspective.

Bibliography

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