

8.4 End-Point Authentication

End-point authentication is the process of one entity proving its identity to another entity over a computer network, for example, a user proving its identity to an email server. As humans, we authenticate each other in many ways: We recognize each other's faces when we meet, we recognize each other's voices on the telephone, we are authenticated by the customs official who checks us against the picture on our passport.

In this section, we consider how one party can authenticate another party when the two are communicating over a network. We focus here on authenticating a “live” party, at the point in time when communication is actually occurring. A concrete example is a user authenticating him or herself to an e-mail server. This is a subtly different problem from proving that a message received at some point in the past did indeed come from that claimed sender, as studied in Section 8.3.

When performing authentication over the network, the communicating parties cannot rely on biometric information, such as a visual appearance or a voice-print. Indeed, we will see in our later case studies that it is often network elements such as routers and client/server processes that must authenticate each other. Here, authentication must be done solely on the basis of messages and data exchanged as part of an **authentication protocol**. Typically, an authentication protocol would run *before* the two communicating parties run some other protocol (for example, a reliable data transfer protocol, a routing information exchange protocol, or an e-mail protocol). The authentication protocol first establishes the identities of the parties to each other's satisfaction; only after authentication do the parties get down to the work at hand.

As in the case of our development of a reliable data transfer (rdt) protocol in Chapter 3, we will find it instructive here to develop various versions of an authentication protocol, which we will call **ap** (authentication protocol), and poke holes in each version as we proceed. (If you enjoy this stepwise evolution of a design, you might also enjoy [Bryant 1988], which recounts a fictitious narrative between designers of an open-network authentication system, and their discovery of the many subtle issues involved.)

Let's assume that Alice needs to authenticate herself to Bob.

8.4.1 Authentication Protocol *ap1.0*

Perhaps the simplest authentication protocol we can imagine is one where Alice simply sends a message to Bob saying she is Alice. This protocol is shown in Figure 8.15. The flaw here is obvious—there is no way for Bob actually to know