In this chapter, we study the conceptual and implementation aspects of network applications. We begin by defining key application-layer concepts, including network services required by applications, clients and servers, processes, and transport-layer interfaces. We examine several network applications in detail, including the Web, e-mail, DNS, peer-to-peer (P2P) file distribution, and video streaming. We then cover network application development, over both TCP and UDP. In particular, we study the socket interface and walk through some simple client-server applications in Python. We also provide several fun and interesting socket programming assignments at the end of the chapter.

The application layer is a particularly good place to start our study of protocols. It's familiar ground. We're acquainted with many of the applications that rely on the protocols we'll study. It will give us a good feel for what protocols are all about and will introduce us to many of the same issues that we'll see again when we study transport, network, and link layer protocols.

2.1 Principles of Network Applications

Suppose you have an idea for a new network application. Perhaps this application will be a great service to humanity, or will please your professor, or will bring you great wealth, or will simply be fun to develop. Whatever the motivation may be, let's now examine how you transform the idea into a real-world network application.

At the core of network application development is writing programs that run on different end systems and communicate with each other over the network. For example, in the Web application there are two distinct programs that communicate with each other: the browser program running in the user's host (desktop, laptop, tablet, smartphone, and so on); and the Web server program running in the Web server host. As another example, in a Video on Demand application such as Netflix (see Section 2.6), there is a Netflix-provided program running on the user's smartphone, tablet, or computer; and a Netflix server program running on the Netflix server host. Servers often (but certainly not always) are housed in a data center, as shown in Figure 2.1.

Thus, when developing your new application, you need to write software that will run on multiple end systems. This software could be written, for example, in C, Java, or Python. Importantly, you do not need to write software that runs on network-core devices, such as routers or link-layer switches. Even if you wanted to write application software for these network-core devices, you wouldn't be able to do so. As we learned in Chapter 1, and as shown earlier in Figure 1.24, network-core devices do not function at the application layer but instead function at lower layers—specifically at the network layer and below. This basic design—namely, confining application software to the end systems—as shown in Figure 2.1, has facilitated the rapid development and deployment of a vast array of network applications.

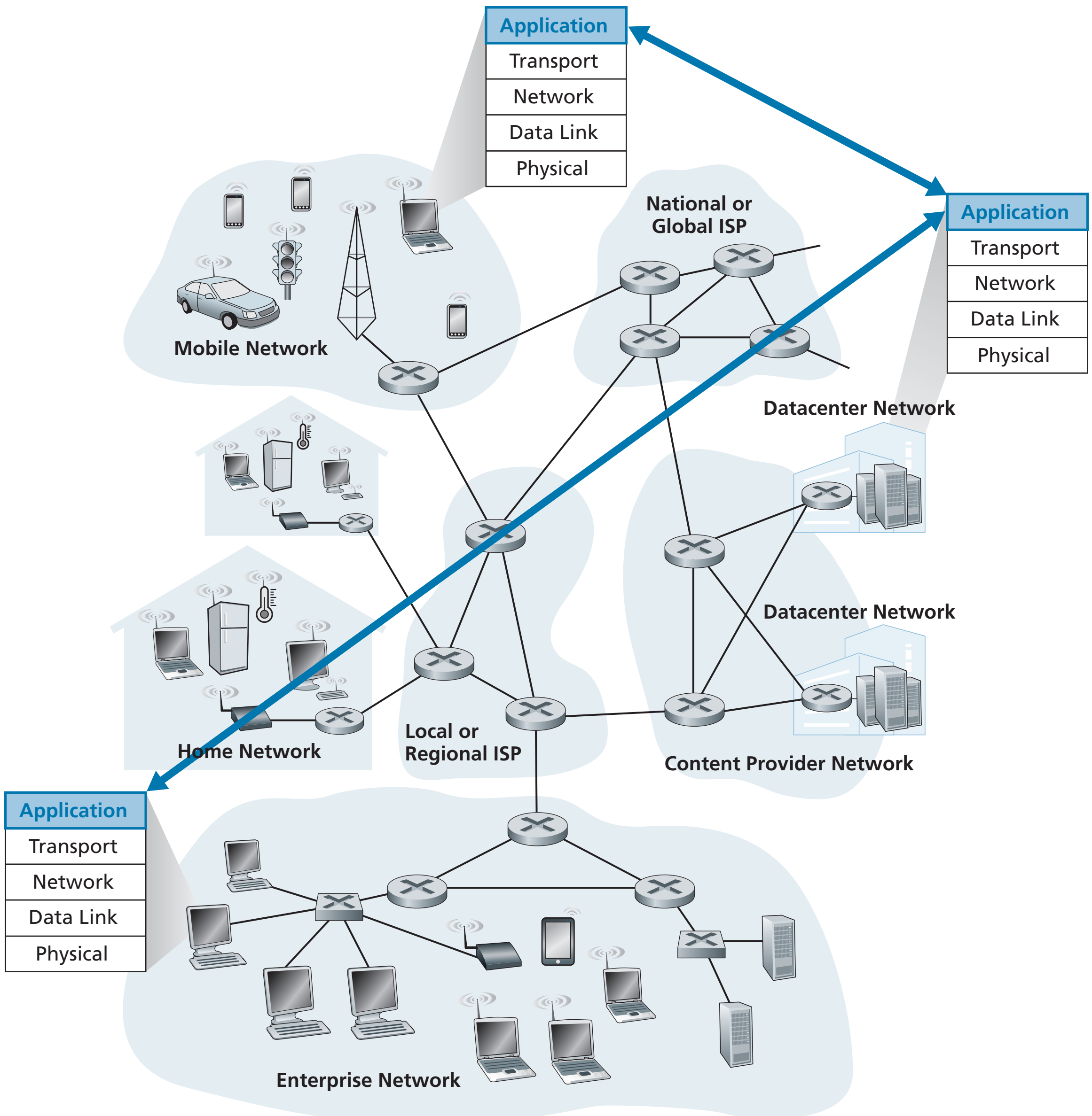

Figure 2.1 ♦ Communication for a network application takes place between end systems at the application layer

2.1.1 Network Application Architectures

Before diving into software coding, you should have a broad architectural plan for your application. Keep in mind that an application's architecture is distinctly different from the network architecture (e.g., the five-layer Internet architecture discussed in Chapter 1). From the application developer's perspective, the network architecture is fixed and provides a specific set of services to applications. The **application architecture**, on the other hand, is designed by the application developer and dictates how the application is structured over the various end systems. In choosing the application architecture, an application developer will likely draw on one of the two predominant architectural paradigms used in modern network applications: the client-server architecture or the peer-to-peer (P2P) architecture.

In a **client-server architecture**, there is an always-on host, called the *server*, which services requests from many other hosts, called *clients*. A classic example is the Web application for which an always-on Web server services requests from browsers running on client hosts. When a Web server receives a request for an object from a client host, it responds by sending the requested object to the client host. Note that with the client-server architecture, clients do not directly communicate with each other; for example, in the Web application, two browsers do not directly communicate. Another characteristic of the client-server architecture is that the server has a fixed, well-known address, called an IP address (which we'll discuss soon). Because the server has a fixed, well-known address, and because the server is always on, a client can always contact the server by sending a packet to the server's IP address. Some of the better-known applications with a client-server architecture include the Web, FTP, Telnet, and e-mail. The client-server architecture is shown in Figure 2.2(a).

Often in a client-server application, a single-server host is incapable of keeping up with all the requests from clients. For example, a popular social-networking site can quickly become overwhelmed if it has only one server handling all of its requests. For this reason, a **data center**, housing a large number of hosts, is often used to create a powerful virtual server. The most popular Internet services—such as search engines (e.g., Google, Bing, Baidu), Internet commerce (e.g., Amazon, eBay, Alibaba), Web-based e-mail (e.g., Gmail and Yahoo Mail), social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WeChat)—run in one or more data centers. As discussed in Section 1.3.3, Google has 19 data centers distributed around the world, which collectively handle search, YouTube, Gmail, and other services. A data center can have hundreds of thousands of servers, which must be powered and maintained. Additionally, the service providers must pay recurring interconnection and bandwidth costs for sending data from their data centers.

In a **P2P architecture**, there is minimal (or no) reliance on dedicated servers in data centers. Instead the application exploits direct communication between pairs of intermittently connected hosts, called *peers*. The peers are not owned by the service provider, but are instead desktops and laptops controlled by users, with most of the peers residing in homes, universities, and offices. Because the peers communicate

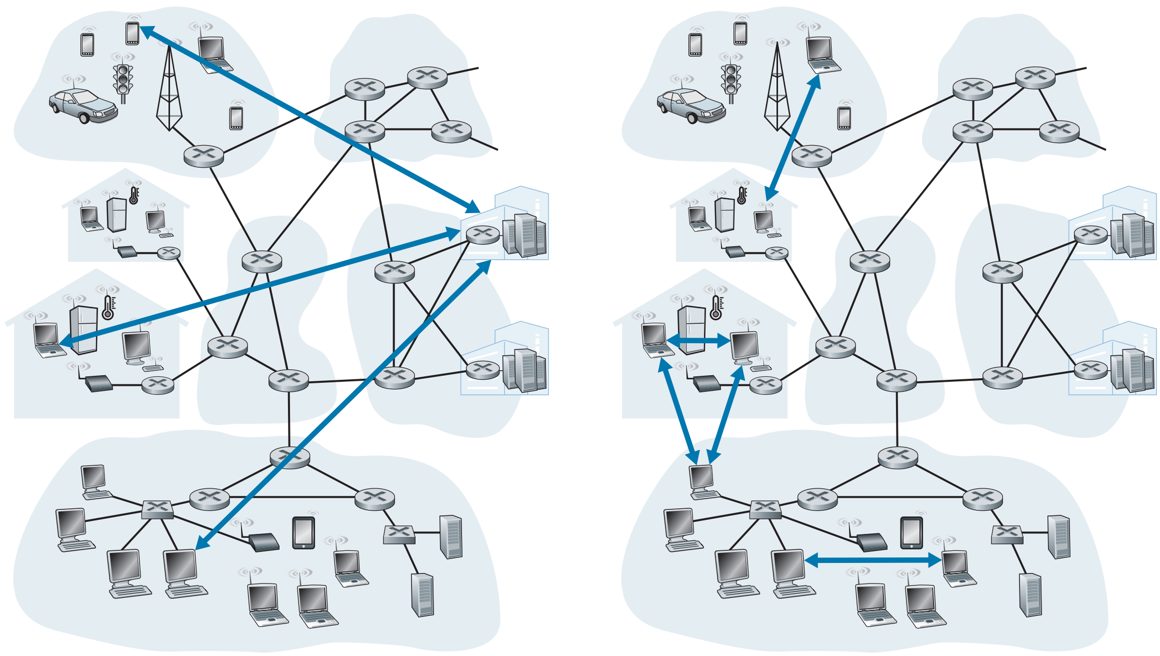

Figure 2.2 ♦ (a) Client-server architecture; (b) P2P architecture

without passing through a dedicated server, the architecture is called peer-to-peer. An example of a popular P2P application is the file-sharing application BitTorrent.

One of the most compelling features of P2P architectures is their **self-scalability**. For example, in a P2P file-sharing application, although each peer generates workload by requesting files, each peer also adds service capacity to the system by distributing files to other peers. P2P architectures are also cost effective, since they normally don't require significant server infrastructure and server bandwidth (in contrast with clients-server designs with datacenters). However, P2P applications face challenges of security, performance, and reliability due to their highly decentralized structure.

2.1.2 Processes Communicating

Before building your network application, you also need a basic understanding of how the programs, running in multiple end systems, communicate with each other. In the jargon of operating systems, it is not actually programs but **processes** that communicate. A process can be thought of as a program that is running within an end system. When processes are running on the same end system, they can communicate with each other with interprocess communication, using rules that are governed by the end system's operating system. But in this book, we are not particularly interested in how processes in the same host communicate, but instead in how processes running on *different* hosts (with potentially different operating systems) communicate.

Processes on two different end systems communicate with each other by exchanging **messages** across the computer network. A sending process creates and sends messages into the network; a receiving process receives these messages and possibly responds by sending messages back. Figure 2.1 illustrates that processes communicating with each other reside in the application layer of the five-layer protocol stack.

Client and Server Processes

A network application consists of pairs of processes that send messages to each other over a network. For example, in the Web application a client browser process exchanges messages with a Web server process. In a P2P file-sharing system, a file is transferred from a process in one peer to a process in another peer. For each pair of communicating processes, we typically label one of the two processes as the **client** and the other process as the **server**. With the Web, a browser is a client process and a Web server is a server process. With P2P file sharing, the peer that is downloading the file is labeled as the client, and the peer that is uploading the file is labeled as the server.

You may have observed that in some applications, such as in P2P file sharing, a process can be both a client and a server. Indeed, a process in a P2P file-sharing system can both upload and download files. Nevertheless, in the context of any given communication session between a pair of processes, we can still label one process as the client and the other process as the server. We define the client and server processes as follows:

> *In the context of a communication session between a pair of processes, the process that initiates the communication (that is, initially contacts the other process at the beginning of the session) is labeled as the* client*. The process that waits to be contacted to begin the session is the* server.

In the Web, a browser process initializes contact with a Web server process; hence the browser process is the client and the Web server process is the server. In P2P file sharing, when Peer A asks Peer B to send a specific file, Peer A is the client and Peer B is the server in the context of this specific communication session. When there's no confusion, we'll sometimes also use the terminology "client side and server side of an application." At the end of this chapter, we'll step through simple code for both the client and server sides of network applications.

The Interface Between the Process and the Computer Network

As noted above, most applications consist of pairs of communicating processes, with the two processes in each pair sending messages to each other. Any message sent from one process to another must go through the underlying network. A process sends messages into, and receives messages from, the network through a software interface called a **socket**. Let's consider an analogy to help us understand processes and sockets. A process is analogous to a house and its socket is analogous to its door. When a process wants to send a message to another process on another host, it shoves the message out its door (socket). This sending process assumes that there is a transportation infrastructure on the other side of its door that will transport the message to the door of the destination process. Once the message arrives at the destination host, the message passes through the receiving process's door (socket), and the receiving process then acts on the message.

Figure 2.3 illustrates socket communication between two processes that communicate over the Internet. (Figure 2.3 assumes that the underlying transport protocol used by the processes is the Internet's TCP protocol.) As shown in this figure, a socket is the interface between the application layer and the transport layer within a host. It is also referred to as the **Application Programming Interface (API)** between the application and the network, since the socket is the programming interface with which network applications are built. The application developer has control of everything on the application-layer side of the socket but has little control of the transport-layer side of the socket. The only control that the application developer has on the transport-layer side is (1) the choice of transport protocol and (2) perhaps the ability to fix a few

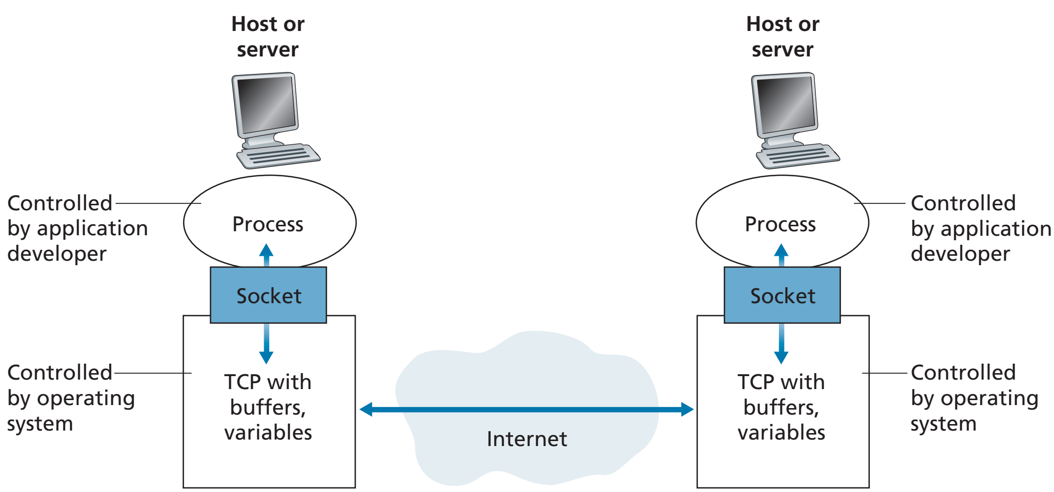

Figure 2.3 ♦ Application processes, sockets, and underlying transport protocol

transport-layer parameters such as maximum buffer and maximum segment sizes (to be covered in Chapter 3). Once the application developer chooses a transport protocol (if a choice is available), the application is built using the transport-layer services provided by that protocol. We'll explore sockets in some detail in Section 2.7.

Addressing Processes

In order to send postal mail to a particular destination, the destination needs to have an address. Similarly, in order for a process running on one host to send packets to a process running on another host, the receiving process needs to have an address. To identify the receiving process, two pieces of information need to be specified: (1) the address of the host and (2) an identifier that specifies the receiving process in the destination host.

In the Internet, the host is identified by its **IP address**. We'll discuss IP addresses in great detail in Chapter 4. For now, all we need to know is that an IP address is a 32-bit quantity that we can think of as uniquely identifying the host. In addition to knowing the address of the host to which a message is destined, the sending process must also identify the receiving process (more specifically, the receiving socket) running in the host. This information is needed because in general a host could be running many network applications. A destination **port number** serves this purpose. Popular applications have been assigned specific port numbers. For example, a Web server is identified by port number 80. A mail server process (using the SMTP protocol) is identified by port number 25. A list of well-known port numbers for all Internet standard protocols can be found at www.iana.org. We'll examine port numbers in detail in Chapter 3.

2.1.3 Transport Services Available to Applications

Recall that a socket is the interface between the application process and the transport-layer protocol. The application at the sending side pushes messages through the socket. At the other side of the socket, the transport-layer protocol has the responsibility of getting the messages to the socket of the receiving process.

Many networks, including the Internet, provide more than one transport-layer protocol. When you develop an application, you must choose one of the available transport-layer protocols. How do you make this choice? Most likely, you would study the services provided by the available transport-layer protocols, and then pick the protocol with the services that best match your application's needs. The situation is similar to choosing either train or airplane transport for travel between two cities. You have to choose one or the other, and each transportation mode offers different services. (For example, the train offers downtown pickup and drop-off, whereas the plane offers shorter travel time.)

What are the services that a transport-layer protocol can offer to applications invoking it? We can broadly classify the possible services along four dimensions: reliable data transfer, throughput, timing, and security.

Reliable Data Transfer

As discussed in Chapter 1, packets can get lost within a computer network. For example, a packet can overflow a buffer in a router, or can be discarded by a host or router after having some of its bits corrupted. For many applications—such as electronic mail, file transfer, remote host access, Web document transfers, and financial applications—data loss can have devastating consequences (in the latter case, for either the bank or the customer!). Thus, to support these applications, something has to be done to guarantee that the data sent by one end of the application is delivered correctly and completely to the other end of the application. If a protocol provides such a guaranteed data delivery service, it is said to provide **reliable data transfer**. One important service that a transport-layer protocol can potentially provide to an application is process-to-process reliable data transfer. When a transport protocol provides this service, the sending process can just pass its data into the socket and know with complete confidence that the data will arrive without errors at the receiving process.

When a transport-layer protocol doesn't provide reliable data transfer, some of the data sent by the sending process may never arrive at the receiving process. This may be acceptable for **loss-tolerant applications**, most notably multimedia applications such as conversational audio/video that can tolerate some amount of data loss. In these multimedia applications, lost data might result in a small glitch in the audio/video—not a crucial impairment.

Throughput

In Chapter 1, we introduced the concept of available throughput, which, in the context of a communication session between two processes along a network path, is the rate at which the sending process can deliver bits to the receiving process. Because other sessions will be sharing the bandwidth along the network path, and because these other sessions will be coming and going, the available throughput can fluctuate with time. These observations lead to another natural service that a transport-layer protocol could provide, namely, guaranteed available throughput at some specified rate. With such a service, the application could request a guaranteed throughput of r bits/sec, and the transport protocol would then ensure that the available throughput is always at least r bits/sec. Such a guaranteed throughput service would appeal to many applications. For example, if an Internet telephony application encodes voice at 32 kbps, it needs to send data into the network and have data delivered to the receiving application at this rate. If the transport protocol cannot provide this throughput, the application would need to encode at a lower rate (and receive enough throughput to sustain this lower coding rate) or may have to give up, since receiving, say, half of the needed throughput is of little or no use to this Internet telephony application. Applications that have throughput requirements are said to be **bandwidth-sensitive applications**. Many current multimedia applications are bandwidth sensitive, although some multimedia applications may use adaptive coding techniques to encode digitized voice or video at a rate that matches the currently available throughput.

While bandwidth-sensitive applications have specific throughput requirements, **elastic applications** can make use of as much, or as little, throughput as happens to be available. Electronic mail, file transfer, and Web transfers are all elastic applications. Of course, the more throughput, the better. There's an adage that says that one cannot be too rich, too thin, or have too much throughput!

Timing

A transport-layer protocol can also provide timing guarantees. As with throughput guarantees, timing guarantees can come in many shapes and forms. An example guarantee might be that every bit that the sender pumps into the socket arrives at the receiver's socket no more than 100 msec later. Such a service would be appealing to interactive real-time applications, such as Internet telephony, virtual environments, teleconferencing, and multiplayer games, all of which require tight timing constraints on data delivery in order to be effective, see [Gauthier 1999; Ramjee 1994]. Long delays in Internet telephony, for example, tend to result in unnatural pauses in the conversation; in a multiplayer game or virtual interactive environment, a long delay between taking an action and seeing the response from the environment (for example, from another player at the end of an end-to-end connection) makes the application feel less realistic. For non-real-time applications, lower delay is always preferable to higher delay, but no tight constraint is placed on the end-to-end delays.

Security

Finally, a transport protocol can provide an application with one or more security services. For example, in the sending host, a transport protocol can encrypt all data transmitted by the sending process, and in the receiving host, the transport-layer protocol can decrypt the data before delivering the data to the receiving process. Such a service would provide confidentiality between the two processes, even if the data is somehow observed between sending and receiving processes. A transport protocol can also provide other security services in addition to confidentiality, including data integrity and end-point authentication, topics that we'll cover in detail in Chapter 8.

2.1.4 Transport Services Provided by the Internet

Up until this point, we have been considering transport services that a computer network *could* provide in general. Let's now get more specific and examine the type of transport services provided by the Internet. The Internet (and, more generally, TCP/IP networks) makes two transport protocols available to applications, UDP and TCP. When you (as an application developer) create a new network application for the

Application	Data Loss	Throughput	Time-Sensitive
File transfer/download	No loss	Elastic	No
E-mail	No loss	Elastic	No
Web documents	No loss	Elastic (few kbps)	No
Internet telephony/ Video conferencing	Loss-tolerant	Audio: few kbps–1 Mbps Video: 10 kbps–5 Mbps	Yes: 100s of msec
Streaming stored audio/video	Loss-tolerant	Same as above	Yes: few seconds
Interactive games	Loss-tolerant	Few kbps–10 kbps	Yes: 100s of msec
Smartphone messaging	No loss	Elastic	Yes and no

Figure 2.4 ♦ Requirements of selected network applications

Internet, one of the first decisions you have to make is whether to use UDP or TCP. Each of these protocols offers a different set of services to the invoking applications. Figure 2.4 shows the service requirements for some selected applications.

TCP Services

The TCP service model includes a connection-oriented service and a reliable data transfer service. When an application invokes TCP as its transport protocol, the application receives both of these services from TCP.

- *Connection-oriented service.* TCP has the client and server exchange transport-layer control information with each other *before* the application-level messages begin to flow. This so-called handshaking procedure alerts the client and server, allowing them to prepare for an onslaught of packets. After the handshaking phase, a **TCP connection** is said to exist between the sockets of the two processes. The connection is a full-duplex connection in that the two processes can send messages to each other over the connection at the same time. When the application finishes sending messages, it must tear down the connection. In Chapter 3, we'll discuss connection-oriented service in detail and examine how it is implemented.
- *Reliable data transfer service.* The communicating processes can rely on TCP to deliver all data sent without error and in the proper order. When one side of the application passes a stream of bytes into a socket, it can count on TCP to deliver the same stream of bytes to the receiving socket, with no missing or duplicate bytes.

TCP also includes a congestion-control mechanism, a service for the general welfare of the Internet rather than for the direct benefit of the communicating processes. The TCP congestion-control mechanism throttles a sending process (client or server) when the network is congested between sender and receiver. As we will see in Chapter 3, TCP congestion control also attempts to limit each TCP connection to its fair share of network bandwidth.

UDP Services

UDP is a no-frills, lightweight transport protocol, providing minimal services. UDP is connectionless, so there is no handshaking before the two processes start to communicate. UDP provides an unreliable data transfer service—that is, when a process sends a message into a UDP socket, UDP provides *no* guarantee that the message will ever reach the receiving process. Furthermore, messages that do arrive at the receiving process may arrive out of order.

FOCUS ON SECURITY

SECURING TCP

Neither TCP nor UDP provides any encryption—the data that the sending process passes into its socket is the same data that travels over the network to the destination process. So, for example, if the sending process sends a password in cleartext (i.e., unencrypted) into its socket, the cleartext password will travel over all the links between sender and receiver, potentially getting sniffed and discovered at any of the intervening links. Because privacy and other security issues have become critical for many applications, the Internet community has developed an enhancement for TCP, called **Transport Layer Security** (TLS) [RFC 5246]. TCP-enhanced-with-TLS not only does everything that traditional TCP does but also provides critical process-to-process security services, including encryption, data integrity, and end-point authentication. We emphasize that TLS is not a third Internet transport protocol, on the same level as TCP and UDP, but instead is an enhancement of TCP, with the enhancements being implemented in the application layer. In particular, if an application wants to use the services of TLS, it needs to include TLS code (existing, highly optimized libraries and classes) in both the client and server sides of the application. TLS has its own socket API that is similar to the traditional TCP socket API. When an application uses TLS, the sending process passes cleartext data to the TLS socket; TLS in the sending host then encrypts the data and passes the encrypted data to the TCP socket. The encrypted data travels over the Internet to the TCP socket in the receiving process. The receiving socket passes the encrypted data to TLS, which decrypts the data. Finally, TLS passes the cleartext data through its TLS socket to the receiving process. We'll cover TLS in some detail in Chapter 8.

UDP does not include a congestion-control mechanism, so the sending side of UDP can pump data into the layer below (the network layer) at any rate it pleases. (Note, however, that the actual end-to-end throughput may be less than this rate due to the limited transmission capacity of intervening links or due to congestion).

Services Not Provided by Internet Transport Protocols

We have organized transport protocol services along four dimensions: reliable data transfer, throughput, timing, and security. Which of these services are provided by TCP and UDP? We have already noted that TCP provides reliable end-to-end data transfer. And we also know that TCP can be easily enhanced at the application layer with TLS to provide security services. But in our brief description of TCP and UDP, conspicuously missing was any mention of throughput or timing guarantees—services *not* provided by today's Internet transport protocols. Does this mean that time-sensitive applications such as Internet telephony cannot run in today's Internet? The answer is clearly no—the Internet has been hosting time-sensitive applications for many years. These applications often work fairly well because they have been designed to cope, to the greatest extent possible, with this lack of guarantee. Nevertheless, clever design has its limitations when delay is excessive, or the end-to-end throughput is limited. In summary, today's Internet can often provide satisfactory service to time-sensitive applications, but it cannot provide any timing or throughput guarantees.

Figure 2.5 indicates the transport protocols used by some popular Internet applications. We see that e-mail, remote terminal access, the Web, and file transfer all use TCP. These applications have chosen TCP primarily because TCP provides reliable data transfer, guaranteeing that all data will eventually get to its destination. Because Internet telephony applications (such as Skype) can often tolerate some loss but require a minimal rate to be effective, developers of Internet telephony applications

Application	Application-Layer Protocol	Underlying Transport Protocol
Electronic mail	SMTP [RFC 5321]	TCP
Remote terminal access	Telnet [RFC 854]	TCP
Web	HTTP 1.1 [RFC 7230]	TCP
File transfer	FTP [RFC 959]	TCP
Streaming multimedia	HTTP (e.g., YouTube), DASH	TCP
Internet telephony	SIP [RFC 3261], RTP [RFC 3550], or proprietary (e.g., Skype)	UDP or TCP

Figure 2.5 ♦ Popular Internet applications, their application-layer protocols, and their underlying transport protocols

usually prefer to run their applications over UDP, thereby circumventing TCP's congestion control mechanism and packet overheads. But because many firewalls are configured to block (most types of) UDP traffic, Internet telephony applications often are designed to use TCP as a backup if UDP communication fails.

2.1.5 Application-Layer Protocols

We have just learned that network processes communicate with each other by sending messages into sockets. But how are these messages structured? What are the meanings of the various fields in the messages? When do the processes send the messages? These questions bring us into the realm of application-layer protocols. An **application-layer protocol** defines how an application's processes, running on different end systems, pass messages to each other. In particular, an application-layer protocol defines:

- The types of messages exchanged, for example, request messages and response messages
- The syntax of the various message types, such as the fields in the message and how the fields are delineated
- The semantics of the fields, that is, the meaning of the information in the fields
- Rules for determining when and how a process sends messages and responds to messages

Some application-layer protocols are specified in RFCs and are therefore in the public domain. For example, the Web's application-layer protocol, HTTP (the HyperText Transfer Protocol [RFC 7230]), is available as an RFC. If a browser developer follows the rules of the HTTP RFC, the browser will be able to retrieve Web pages from any Web server that has also followed the rules of the HTTP RFC. Many other application-layer protocols are proprietary and intentionally not available in the public domain. For example, Skype uses proprietary application-layer protocols.

It is important to distinguish between network applications and application-layer protocols. An application-layer protocol is only one piece of a network application (albeit, a very important piece of the application from our point of view!). Let's look at a couple of examples. The Web is a client-server application that allows users to obtain documents from Web servers on demand. The Web application consists of many components, including a standard for document formats (that is, HTML), Web browsers (for example, Chrome and Microsoft Internet Explorer), Web servers (for example, Apache and Microsoft servers), and an application-layer protocol. The Web's application-layer protocol, HTTP, defines the format and sequence of messages exchanged between browser and Web server. Thus, HTTP is only one piece (albeit, an important piece) of the Web application. As another example, we'll see in Section 2.6 that Netflix's video service also has many components, including servers that store and transmit videos, other servers that manage billing and other client functions, clients (e.g., the Netflix app on your smartphone, tablet, or computer), and an application-level DASH protocol defines the format and sequence of messages exchanged between a Netflix server and client. Thus, DASH is only one piece (albeit, an important piece) of the Netflix application.

2.1.6 Network Applications Covered in This Book

New applications are being developed every day. Rather than covering a large number of Internet applications in an encyclopedic manner, we have chosen to focus on a small number of applications that are both pervasive and important. In this chapter, we discuss five important applications: the Web, electronic mail, directory service, video streaming, and P2P applications. We first discuss the Web, not only because it is an enormously popular application, but also because its application-layer protocol, HTTP, is straightforward and easy to understand. We then discuss electronic mail, the Internet's first killer application. E-mail is more complex than the Web in the sense that it makes use of not one but several application-layer protocols. After e-mail, we cover DNS, which provides a directory service for the Internet. Most users do not interact with DNS directly; instead, users invoke DNS indirectly through other applications (including the Web, file transfer, and electronic mail). DNS illustrates nicely how a piece of core network functionality (network-name to network-address translation) can be implemented at the application layer in the Internet. We then discuss P2P file sharing applications, and complete our application study by discussing video streaming on demand, including distributing stored video over content distribution networks.

2.2 The Web and HTTP

Until the early 1990s, the Internet was used primarily by researchers, academics, and university students to log in to remote hosts, to transfer files from local hosts to remote hosts and vice versa, to receive and send news, and to receive and send electronic mail. Although these applications were (and continue to be) extremely useful, the Internet was essentially unknown outside of the academic and research communities. Then, in the early 1990s, a major new application arrived on the scene—the World Wide Web [Berners-Lee 1994]. The Web was the first Internet application that caught the general public's eye. It dramatically changed how people interact inside and outside their work environments. It elevated the Internet from just one of many data networks to essentially the one and only data network.

Perhaps what appeals the most to users is that the Web operates *on demand*. Users receive what they want, when they want it. This is unlike traditional broadcast