Debugging Rails Applications

Ruby on Rails

Debugging Rails Applications

Debugging Rails Applications
1 View Helpers for Debugging
1.1 debug
1.2 to yaml
1.3 inspect
2 The Logger
2.1 What is the Logger?
2.2 Log Levels
2.3 Sending Messages
2.4 Tagged Logging
2.5 Impact of Logs on Performance
3 Debugging with the byebug gem
3.1 Setup
3.2 The Shell
3.3 The Context
3.4 Threads
3.5 Inspecting Variables
3.6 Step by Step
3.7 Breakpoints
3.8 Catching Exceptions
3.9 Resuming Execution
3.10 Editing
3.11 Quitting
3.12 Settings
4 Debugging Memory Leaks
4.1 Valgrind
5 Plugins for Debugging
<u>6 References</u>
Feedback

Debugging Rails Applications

This guide introduces techniques for debugging Ruby on Rails applications. After reading this guide, you will know:

- The purpose of debugging.
- How to track down problems and issues in your application that your tests aren't identifying.
- The different ways of debugging.
- How to analyze the stack trace.

1 View Helpers for Debugging

One common task is to inspect the contents of a variable. In Rails, you can do this with three methods:

- debug
- to_yaml
- inspect

1.1 debug

The debug helper will return a

```
tag that renders the object using the YAML format. This will generate human-read?
<%= debug @article %>
>
  <b>Title:</b>
  <%= @article.title %>
You'll see something like this:
--- !ruby/object Article
attributes:
  updated at: 2008-09-05 22:55:47
  body: It's a very helpful guide for debugging your Rails app.
  title: Rails debugging guide
  published: t
  id: "1"
  created at: 2008-09-05 22:55:47
attributes cache: {}
Title: Rails debugging guide
```

1.2 to_yaml

Displaying an instance variable, or any other object or method, in YAML format can be achieved this way:

```
<%= simple_format @article.to_yaml %>
<<p><</p>
```

The to_yaml method converts the method to YAML format leaving it more readable, and then the simple_format helper is used to render each line as in the console. This is how debug method does its magic.

As a result of this, you will have something like this in your view:

```
--- !ruby/object Article
attributes:
updated_at: 2008-09-05 22:55:47
body: It's a very helpful guide for debugging your Rails app.
title: Rails debugging guide
published: t
id: "1"
created_at: 2008-09-05 22:55:47
attributes_cache: {}

Title: Rails debugging guide
```

1.3 inspect

Another useful method for displaying object values is inspect, especially when working with arrays or hashes. This will print the object value as a string. For example:

Will be rendered as follows:

```
[1, 2, 3, 4, 5]
Title: Rails debugging guide
```

2 The Logger

It can also be useful to save information to log files at runtime. Rails maintains a separate log file for each runtime environment.

2.1 What is the Logger?

Rails makes use of the ActiveSupport::Logger class to write log information. You can also substitute another logger such as Log4r if you wish.

You can specify an alternative logger in your environment.rb or any environment file:

```
Rails.logger = Logger.new(STDOUT)
Rails.logger = Log4r::Logger.new("Application Log")
```

Or in the Initializer section, add of the following

```
config.logger = Logger.new(STDOUT)
config.logger = Log4r::Logger.new("Application Log")
```

Info: By default, each log is created under Rails.root/log/ and the log file is named after the environment in which the application is running.

2.2 Log Levels

When something is logged it's printed into the corresponding log if the log level of the message is equal or higher than the configured log level. If you want to know the current log level you can call the Rails.logger.level method.

The available log levels are: :debug, :info, :warn, :error, :fatal, and :unknown, corresponding to the log level numbers from 0 up to 5 respectively. To change the default log level, use

```
config.log_level = :warn # In any environment initializer, or
Rails.logger.level = 0 # at any time
```

This is useful when you want to log under development or staging, but you don't want to flood your production log with unnecessary information.

Info: The default Rails log level is debug in all environments.

2.3 Sending Messages

To write in the current log use the logger. (debug|info|warn|error|fatal) method from within a

controller, model or mailer:

```
logger.debug "Person attributes hash: #{@person.attributes.inspect}"
logger.info "Processing the request..."
logger.fatal "Terminating application, raised unrecoverable error!!!"
```

Here's an example of a method instrumented with extra logging:

```
class ArticlesController < ApplicationController
# ...

def create
    @article = Article.new(params[:article])
    logger.debug "New article: #{@article.attributes.inspect}"
    logger.debug "Article should be valid: #{@article.valid?}"

    if @article.save
        flash[:notice] = 'Article was successfully created.'
        logger.debug "The article was saved and now the user is going to be redired redirect_to(@article)
    else
        render action: "new"
    end
end
# ...
end</pre>
```

Here's an example of the log generated when this controller action is executed:

```
Processing ArticlesController#create (for 127.0.0.1 at 2008-09-08 11:52:54) [POS: Session ID: BAh7BzoMY3NyZl9pZCIIMDY5MWU1MZI1ZDRjODBlMzkyMWI1OTg2NWQyNzViZjYiCm: vbkNvbnRyb2xsZXI6OkZsYXNoOjpGbGFzaEhhc2h7AAY6CkB1c2VkewA=--b18cd92fba90eacf8137e! Parameters: {"commit"=>"Create", "article"=>{"title"=>"Debugging Rails", "body"=>"I'm learning how to print in logs!!!", "published"=>"0"}, "authenticity_token"=>"2059c1286e93402e389127b1153204e0d1e275dd", "action"=>"created at"=>nil, "title"=>"Debugging Rails", "body"=>"I'm learning "published"=>false, "created at"=>nil, "title"=>"Debugging Rails", "body"=>"I'm learning "published"=>false, "created at"=>nil}
Article Should be valid: true

Article Create (0.000443) INSERT INTO "articles" ("updated at", "title", "boce "created at") VALUES('2008-09-08 14:52:54', 'Debugging Rails', 'I''m learning how to print in logs!!!', 'f', '2008-09-08 14:52:54')
The article was saved and now the user is going to be redirected...
Redirected to # Article:0x20af760>
Completed in 0.01224 (81 regs/sec) | DB: 0.00044 (3%) | 302 Found [http://localhected to be redirected in the complete in the comple
```

Adding extra logging like this makes it easy to search for unexpected or unusual behavior in your logs. If you add extra logging, be sure to make sensible use of log levels to avoid filling your production logs with useless trivia.

2.4 Tagged Logging

When running multi-user, multi-account applications, it's often useful to be able to filter the logs using

some custom rules. TaggedLogging in Active Support helps in doing exactly that by stamping log lines with subdomains, request ids, and anything else to aid debugging such applications.

```
logger = ActiveSupport::TaggedLogging.new(Logger.new(STDOUT))
logger.tagged("BCX") { logger.info "Stuff" } # Logs "
logger.tagged("BCX", "Jason") { logger.info "Stuff" } # Logs "
logger.tagged("BCX") { logger.tagged("Jason") { logger.info "Stuff" } } # Logs "
```

2.5 Impact of Logs on Performance

Logging will always have a small impact on performance of your rails app, particularly when logging to disk. However, there are a few subtleties:

Using the :debug level will have a greater performance penalty than :fatal, as a far greater number of strings are being evaluated and written to the log output (e.g. disk).

Another potential pitfall is that if you have many calls to Logger like this in your code:

```
logger.debug "Person attributes hash: #{@person.attributes.inspect}"
```

In the above example, There will be a performance impact even if the allowed output level doesn't include debug. The reason is that Ruby has to evaluate these strings, which includes instantiating the somewhat heavy string object and interpolating the variables, and which takes time. Therefore, it's recommended to pass blocks to the logger methods, as these are only evaluated if the output level is the same or included in the allowed level (i.e. lazy loading). The same code rewritten would be:

```
logger.debug {"Person attributes hash: #{@person.attributes.inspect}"}
```

The contents of the block, and therefore the string interpolation, is only evaluated if debug is enabled. This performance savings is only really noticeable with large amounts of logging, but it's a good practice to employ.

3 Debugging with the byebug gem

When your code is behaving in unexpected ways, you can try printing to logs or the console to diagnose the problem. Unfortunately, there are times when this sort of error tracking is not effective in finding the root cause of a problem. When you actually need to journey into your running source code, the debugger is your best companion.

The debugger can also help you if you want to learn about the Rails source code but don't know where to start. Just debug any request to your application and use this guide to learn how to move from the code you have written deeper into Rails code.

3.1 Setup

You can use the byebug gem to set breakpoints and step through live code in Rails. To install it, just run:

```
$ gem install byebug
```

Inside any Rails application you can then invoke the debugger by calling the byebug method.

Here's an example:

```
class PeopleController < ApplicationController
  def new
    byebug
    @person = Person.new
  end
end</pre>
```

3.2 The Shell

As soon as your application calls the byebug method, the debugger will be started in a debugger shell inside the terminal window where you launched your application server, and you will be placed at the debugger's prompt (byebug). Before the prompt, the code around the line that is about to be run will be displayed and the current line will be marked by '=>'. Like this:

```
[1, 10] in /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles_controller.rb
3:
    4:  # GET /articles
5:  # GET /articles.json
6:  def index
7:  byebug
=> 8:  @articles = Article.find_recent
9:
10:  respond_to do |format|
11:  format.html # index.html.erb
```

```
12: format.json { render json: @articles }
(byebug)
```

If you got there by a browser request, the browser tab containing the request will be hung until the debugger has finished and the trace has finished processing the entire request.

For example:

(byebug) help

byebug 2.7.0

```
=> Booting WEBrick
=> Rails 4.2.0 application starting in development on http://0.0.0.0:3000
=> Run `rails server -h` for more startup options
=> Notice: server is listening on all interfaces (0.0.0.0). Consider using 127.0
=> Ctrl-C to shutdown server
[2014-04-11 13:11:47] INFO WEBrick 1.3.1
[2014-04-11 13:11:47] INFO ruby 2.1.1 (2014-02-24) [i686-linux]
[2014-04-11 13:11:47] INFO WEBrick::HTTPServer#start: pid=6370 port=3000
Started GET "/" for 127.0.0.1 at 2014-04-11 13:11:48 +0200
  ActiveRecord::SchemaMigration Load (0.2ms) SELECT "schema migrations".* FROM '
Processing by ArticlesController#index as HTML
[3, 12] in /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles controller.rb
    3:
    4:
        # GET /articles
    5:
        # GET /articles.json
    6:
        def index
    7:
         byebug
  8:
          @articles = Article.find recent
    9:
   10:
         respond to do |format|
   11:
             format.html # index.html.erb
   12:
             format.json { render json: @articles }
(byebug)
```

Now it's time to explore and dig into your application. A good place to start is by asking the debugger for help. Type: help

```
Type 'help <command-name>' for help on a specific command
Available commands:
backtrace delete enable help
                                   list
                                           pry next restart source
                                                                      up
        disable eval
                         info
break
                                   method ps
                                                    save
                                                            step
                                                                       var
      display exit interrupt next
catch
                                           putl
                                                    set
                                                            thread
condition down finish irb
                                   р
                                           quit
                                                    show
                                                            trace
continue edit
                 frame
                         kill
                                           reload
                                                            undisplay
                                   рр
                                                    skip
```

Info: To view the help menu for any command use help <command-name> at the debugger prompt.

For example: You can abbreviate any debugging command by supplying just enough letters to distinguish them from other commands, so you can also use 1 for the list command, for example.

To see the previous ten lines you should type list- (or 1-)

```
(byebug) 1-
[1, 10] in /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles controller.rb
      class ArticlesController < ApplicationController</pre>
        before action :set article, only: [:show, :edit, :update, :destroy]
  2
  3
  4
       # GET /articles
  5
        # GET /articles.json
  6
       def index
  7
         byebug
          @articles = Article.find recent
  9
  10
           respond to do |format|
```

This way you can move inside the file, being able to see the code above and over the line where you added the byebug call. Finally, to see where you are in the code again you can type list=

```
(byebug) list=
[3, 12] in /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles controller.rb
   3:
   4:
        # GET /articles
       # GET /articles.json
   6:
        def index
   7:
          byebuq
          @articles = Article.find recent
   9:
          respond_to do |format|
  10:
            format.html # index.html.erb
  11:
            format.json { render json: @articles }
  12:
(byebug)
```

3.3 The Context

When you start debugging your application, you will be placed in different contexts as you go through the different parts of the stack.

The debugger creates a context when a stopping point or an event is reached. The context has information about the suspended program which enables the debugger to inspect the frame stack, evaluate variables from the perspective of the debugged program, and contains information about the place where the debugged program is stopped.

At any time you can call the backtrace command (or its alias where) to print the backtrace of the application. This can be very helpful to know how you got where you are. If you ever wondered about how you got somewhere in your code, then backtrace will supply the answer.

The current frame is marked with -->. You can move anywhere you want in this trace (thus changing the context) by using the frame _n_ command, where is the specified frame number. If you do that, byebug will display your new context.

```
(byebug) frame 2
[184, 193] in /PathToGems/actionpack-4.2.0/lib/abstract controller/base.rb
              # is the intended way to override action dispatching.
   185:
              # Notice that the first argument is the method to be dispatched
   186:
  187:
              # which is *not* necessarily the same as the action name.
  188:
              def process action(method name, *args)
=> 189:
                send action (method name, *args)
  190:
              end
   191:
             # Actually call the method associated with the action. Override
   192:
   193:
              # this method if you wish to change how action methods are called,
(byebug)
```

The available variables are the same as if you were running the code line by line. After all, that's what debugging is.

You can also use up [n] (u for abbreviated) and down [n] commands in order to change the context frames up or down the stack respectively. defaults to one. Up in this case is towards higher-numbered stack frames, and down is towards lower-numbered stack frames.

3.4 Threads

The debugger can list, stop, resume and switch between running threads by using the thread command (or the abbreviated th). This command has a handful of options:

- thread shows the current thread.
- thread list is used to list all threads and their statuses. The plus + character and the number indicates the current thread of execution.
- ullet thread stop $_{\rm n}$ stop thread.
- thread resume n resumes thread.
- thread switch _n_ switches the current thread context to .

This command is very helpful, among other occasions, when you are debugging concurrent threads and need to verify that there are no race conditions in your code.

3.5 Inspecting Variables

Any expression can be evaluated in the current context. To evaluate an expression, just type it!

This example shows how you can print the instance variables defined within the current context:

```
[3, 12] in /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles controller.rb
    4:
        # GET /articles
    5: # GET /articles.json
    6: def index
7: byebug => 8: @articles = Article.find_recent
   9:
   10: respond to do |format|
   11:
             format.html # index.html.erb
   12:
             format.json { render json: @articles }
(byebug) instance variables
[:@ action has layout, :@ routes, :@ headers, :@ status, :@ request,
 :@ response, :@ env, :@ prefixes, :@ lookup context, :@ action name,
 :@ response body, :@marked for same origin verification, :@ config]
```

As you may have figured out, all of the variables that you can access from a controller are displayed. This list is dynamically updated as you execute code. For example, run the next line using <code>next</code> (you'll learn more about this command later in this guide).

```
(byebug) next
[5, 14] in /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles controller.rb
         # GET /articles.json
   6
         def index
   7
           byebug
           @articles = Article.find recent
   9
=> 10
            respond to do |format|
   11
              format.html # index.html.erb
   12
             format.json { render json: @articles }
   13
           end
   14
         end
   15
(byebug)
```

And then ask again for the instance variables:

```
(byebug) instance_variables.include? "@articles"
true
```

Now @articles is included in the instance variables, because the line defining it was executed.

Info: You can also step into mode with the command irb (of course!). This way an irb session will be started within the context you invoked it. But be warned: this is an experimental feature.

The var method is the most convenient way to show variables and their values. Let's let byebug to help us with it.

This is a great way to inspect the values of the current context variables. For example, to check that we have no local variables currently defined.

```
(byebug) var local
(byebug)
```

You can also inspect for an object method this way:

```
(byebug) var instance Article.new
@_start_transaction_state = {}
@aggregation_cache = {}
@association_cache = {}
@attributes = {"id"=>nil, "created_at"=>nil, "updated_at"=>nil}
@attributes_cache = {}
@changed_attributes = nil
...
```

Info: The commands p (print) and pp (pretty print) can be used to evaluate Ruby expressions and display the value of variables to the console.

You can use also display to start watching variables. This is a good way of tracking the values of a variable while the execution goes on.

```
(byebug) display @articles
1: @articles = nil
```

The variables inside the displaying list will be printed with their values after you move in the stack. To stop displaying a variable use undisplay _n_ where is the variable number (1 in the last example).

3.6 Step by Step

Now you should know where you are in the running trace and be able to print the available variables. But lets continue and move on with the application execution.

Use step (abbreviated s) to continue running your program until the next logical stopping point and return control to the debugger.

You may also use next which is similar to step, but function or method calls that appear within the line of code are executed without stopping.

Info: You can also use step n or next n to move forwards n steps at once.

The difference between next and step is that step stops at the next line of code executed, doing just a single step, while next moves to the next line without descending inside methods.

For example, consider the following situation:

```
Started GET "/" for 127.0.0.1 at 2014-04-11 13:39:23 +0200
Processing by ArticlesController#index as HTML

[1, 8] in /home/davidr/Proyectos/test_app/app/models/article.rb
    1: class Article < ActiveRecord::Base
    2:
    3: def self.find_recent(limit = 10)
    4: byebug
=> 5: where('created_at > ?', 1.week.ago).limit(limit)
    6: end
    7:
    8: end

(byebug)
```

If we use next, we want go deep inside method calls. Instead, byebug will go to the next line within the same context. In this case, this is the last line of the method, so byebug will jump to next next line of the previous frame.

```
(byebug) next
Next went up a frame because previous frame finished
[4, 13] in /PathTo/project/test app/app/controllers/articles controller.rb
    4: # GET /articles
    5: # GET /articles.json
   6: def index
   7:
          @articles = Article.find recent
   8:
=> 9: respond to do |format|
           format.html # index.html.erb
   10:
            format.json { render json: @articles }
   11:
        end
   12:
   13: end
(byebug)
```

If we use step in the same situation, we will literally go the next ruby instruction to be executed. In this case, the activesupport's week method.

```
(byebug) step
[50, 59] in /PathToGems/activesupport-4.2.0/lib/active_support/core_ext/numeric/f
50: ActiveSupport::Duration.new(self * 24.hours, [[:days, self]])
```

```
51: end
52: alias :day :days
53:
54: def weeks
=> 55:     ActiveSupport::Duration.new(self * 7.days, [[:days, self * 7]])
56: end
57: alias :week :weeks
58:
59: def fortnights

(byebug)
```

This is one of the best ways to find bugs in your code, or perhaps in Ruby on Rails.

3.7 Breakpoints

A breakpoint makes your application stop whenever a certain point in the program is reached. The debugger shell is invoked in that line.

You can add breakpoints dynamically with the command break (or just b). There are 3 possible ways of adding breakpoints manually:

- break line: set breakpoint in the in the current source file.
- break file:line [if expression]: set breakpoint in the number inside the . If an is given it must evaluated to to fire up the debugger.
- break class(.|\#)method [if expression]: set breakpoint in (. and # for class and instance method respectively) defined in . The works the same way as with file:line.

For example, in the previous situation

```
[4, 13] in /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles controller.rb
   4: # GET /articles
   5:
       # GET /articles.ison
   6: def index
   7:
        @articles = Article.find recent
   8:
=> 9: respond_to do |format|
  10:
            format.html # index.html.erb
            format.json { render json: @articles }
  11:
        end
  12:
  13:
        end
(byebug) break 11
Created breakpoint 1 at /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles_controller.rb:13
```

Use info breakpoints _n_ or info break _n_ to list breakpoints. If you supply a number, it lists that breakpoint. Otherwise it lists all breakpoints.

```
(byebug) info breakpoints
Num Enb What
1  y at /PathTo/project/app/controllers/articles_controller.rb:11
```

To delete breakpoints: use the command $delete _n_$ to remove the breakpoint number . If no number is specified, it deletes all breakpoints that are currently active.

```
(byebug) delete 1
(byebug) info breakpoints
No breakpoints.
```

You can also enable or disable breakpoints:

- enable breakpoints: allow a list or all of them if no list is specified, to stop your program. This is the default state when you create a breakpoint.
- disable breakpoints: the will have no effect on your program.

3.8 Catching Exceptions

The command catch exception-name (or just cat exception-name) can be used to intercept an exception of type when there would otherwise be no handler for it.

To list all active catchpoints use catch.

3.9 Resuming Execution

There are two ways to resume execution of an application that is stopped in the debugger:

- continue [line-specification] (or c): resume program execution, at the address where your script last stopped; any breakpoints set at that address are bypassed. The optional argument line-specification allows you to specify a line number to set a one-time breakpoint which is deleted when that breakpoint is reached.
- finish [frame-number] (or fin): execute until the selected stack frame returns. If no frame number is given, the application will run until the currently selected frame returns. The currently selected frame starts out the most-recent frame or 0 if no frame positioning (e.g up, down or frame) has been performed. If a frame number is given it will run until the specified frame returns.

3.10 Editing

Two commands allow you to open code from the debugger into an editor:

• edit [file:line]: edit using the editor specified by the EDITOR environment variable. A specific can also be given.

3.11 Quitting

To exit the debugger, use the quit command (abbreviated q), or its alias exit.

A simple quit tries to terminate all threads in effect. Therefore your server will be stopped and you will have to start it again.

3.12 Settings

byebug has a few available options to tweak its behaviour:

- set autoreload: Reload source code when changed (default: true).
- set autolist: Execute list command on every breakpoint (default: true).
- set listsize n : Set number of source lines to list by default to (default: 10)
- set forcestep: Make sure the next and step commands always move to a new line.

You can see the full list by using help set. Use help set _subcommand_ to learn about a particular set command.

Info: You can save these settings in an .byebugrc file in your home directory. The debugger reads these global settings when it starts. For example:

```
set forcestep
set listsize 25
```

4 Debugging Memory Leaks

A Ruby application (on Rails or not), can leak memory - either in the Ruby code or at the C code level.

In this section, you will learn how to find and fix such leaks by using tool such as Valgrind.

4.1 Valgrind

<u>Valgrind</u> is a Linux-only application for detecting C-based memory leaks and race conditions.

There are Valgrind tools that can automatically detect many memory management and threading bugs, and profile your programs in detail. For example, if a C extension in the interpreter calls malloc() but doesn't properly call free(), this memory won't be available until the app terminates.

For further information on how to install Valgrind and use with Ruby, refer to <u>Valgrind and Ruby</u> by Evan Weaver.

5 Plugins for Debugging

There are some Rails plugins to help you to find errors and debug your application. Here is a list of useful plugins for debugging:

- <u>Footnotes</u> Every Rails page has footnotes that give request information and link back to your source via TextMate.
- Query Trace Adds query origin tracing to your logs.
- Query Reviewer This rails plugin not only runs "EXPLAIN" before each of your select queries in development, but provides a small DIV in the rendered output of each page with the summary of warnings for each query that it analyzed.
- Exception Notifier Provides a mailer object and a default set of templates for sending email notifications when errors occur in a Rails application.
- <u>Better Errors</u> Replaces the standard Rails error page with a new one containing more contextual information, like source code and variable inspection.
- <u>RailsPanel</u> Chrome extension for Rails development that will end your tailing of development.log. Have all information about your Rails app requests in the browser in the Developer Tools panel. Provides insight to db/rendering/total times, parameter list, rendered views and more.

6 References

- ruby-debug Homepage
- <u>debugger Homepage</u>
- byebug Homepage
- Article: Debugging a Rails application with ruby-debug
- Ryan Bates' debugging ruby (revised) screencast
- Ryan Bates' stack trace screencast
- Ryan Bates' logger screencast
- Debugging with ruby-debug

Feedback

You're encouraged to help improve the quality of this guide.

Please contribute if you see any typos or factual errors. To get started, you can read our documentation contributions section.

You may also find incomplete content, or stuff that is not up to date. Please do add any missing documentation for master. Make sure to check <u>Edge Guides</u> first to verify if the issues are already fixed or not on the master branch. Check the <u>Ruby on Rails Guides Guidelines</u> for style and conventions.

If for whatever reason you spot something to fix but cannot patch it yourself, please open an issue.

And last but not least, any kind of discussion regarding Ruby on Rails documentation is very welcome in the <u>rubyonrails-docs mailing list</u>.