

ROS 2

Workflow and basic communication

Roberto Masocco
roberto.masocco@uniroma2.it

University of Rome Tor Vergata
Department of Civil Engineering and Computer Science Engineering

May 17, 2023



TOR VERGATA
UNIVERSITY OF ROME

School of Engineering

Recap

ROS 2 is a **DDS**-based, open-source **middleware** for the development of robotics software and **distributed** control architectures.

Today, it is the **de facto** standard for the development of robotic applications, and it is supported by a **vast community** of developers and researchers.

The robotics industry is also exploring the adoption of **Docker containers** into the development workflow, benefitting from some of their main features.

This lecture is [here](#).

Roadmap

1 ROS 2 development workflow

2 C++ bootstrap

3 Message topics

Roadmap

1 ROS 2 development workflow

2 C++ bootstrap

3 Message topics

Installing ROS 2

HOWTO

On **Ubuntu** systems, the easiest way to install ROS 2 Humble is through [Debian packages](#).

The installation steps can be summarized as follows:

- ① ensure that **locales** are properly configured;
- ② **upgrade** your system (required because of some potential [issues with udev](#) that might break your installation ☺);
- ③ add and configure **apt repositories**;
- ④ **install** packages.

We have a script for this: [`bin/ros2_humble_install.sh`](#).

Installing ROS 2

Sourcing the installation

After the installation is complete, in order to use **CLI tools** and have libraries available to **build packages**, you need to **source the installation**:

```
source /opt/ros/humble/setup.bash (there are also a .zsh and a .sh)
```

so that your shell, and all its child processes from then on, will know the **paths** of all the executables and shared objects (libraries) installed by ROS 2.

Additional commands are required to set up **command line completion** and **environment variables**.

We have a script for this too: [config/ros2_cmds.sh](#).

Source it, then enter `ros2humble` and you're good to go!

Language support

Low- vs high-level programming

Currently, ROS 2 officially supports **two programming languages**:

- **C++** (C++17 in Humble)
- **Python** (≥ 3.5 , 3.10 works with Humble)

You can develop software packages using **only one** of them, or **both** at the same time.

Language support

Low- vs high-level programming

The two languages are both fully supported since they are **complementary**:

- **C++** allows to build complex software using **modern paradigms**, but also to easily access the **hardware, libraries**, and **operating system** APIs when required, and to **optimize** the code for **performance**.
- **Python** allows to **rapidly prototype** software, especially high-level modules, and to easily **interact** with the user and **visualize data**.

Note how one lacks the features of the other, and vice versa.

This course will focus on C++, because of its better performance, major functionalities, and widespread use in the industry and robotics development community.

The entire [ros2cli](#) suite is written in Python.

Python examples will still be provided and discussed whenever possible.

Language support

The build system

The ROS 2 build system supports both **C++** and **Python** packages through a common **package manager**: [colcon](#) (collective construction).

Spawned as a child project of the ROS community, its main features are:

- organization of the **build workspace** in a set of standard directories;
- **isolated** builds of packages, with **no pollution** of the system;
- automatic **dependency resolution** and **parallel** builds;
- support for **C/C++** packages through [CMake](#);
- support for **Python** packages through [setuptools](#).

All its configuration for each package can be found in a **package.xml manifest file**.

Language support

CMake

CMake is a **cross-platform** build configuration generator, which allows to build software using a **single, unified syntax** on all supported platforms.

Remember **Makefiles**? CMake is a compiler-agnostic **Makefile generator**.

We will write **CMakeLists.txt** files, which are essentially **scripts** that tell CMake how to build our software.

ROS 2 extends CMake with a set of **macros** and **functions**: the [ament](#) library.

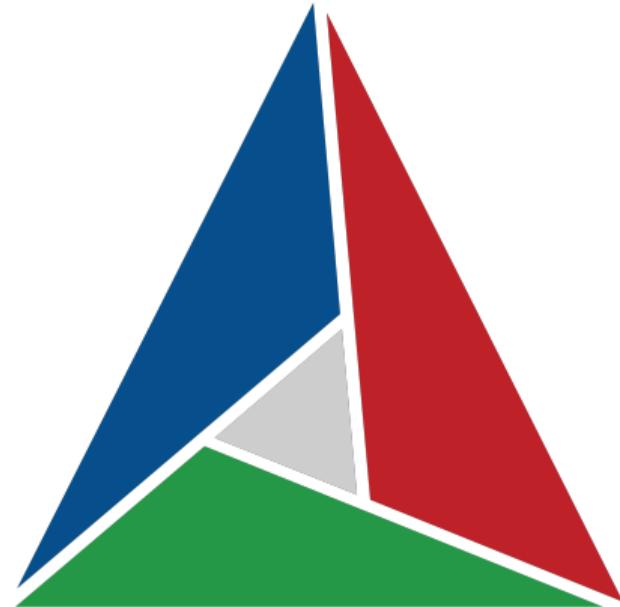


Figure 1: CMake logo.

Language support

setuptools

setuptools is a **Python library** designed to ease the setup of Python projects, namely Python software packages.

Remember nightmarish import issues?
setuptools is a **dependency resolver**.

We will write:

- **setup.py** files, in which the `setup(...)` function specifies the package's metadata and dependencies;
- **setup.cfg** files, which specifies the location of all **executable scripts** in the package.



Figure 2: setuptools logo.

Language support

Building packages with colcon

The only colcon command you may ever use is

```
colcon build
```

which builds all packages in the current workspace (*i.e.*, directory and child directories).

It has many options, but the most useful ones are:

- `--event-handlers` to specify which **build events** to log (*e.g.*, `console_direct+`);
- `--packages-select` to specify which packages to build;
- `--symlink-install` to **symlink** the built packages into the `install/` directory, instead of copying them;
- `--packages-up-to` to build a package and all its dependencies;
- `--packages-ignore` to ignore a package and all its dependencies.

Language support

A note

Beware!

During development, a good 85% of all issues happens during integration and build.

The workspace

Anatomy of a ROS 2 development directory

The organization of directories in a ROS 2 workspace is **standardized** because of colcon.
We have, at least:

- build/ (autogenerated), which contains the **build artifacts** of all packages;
- install/ (autogenerated), which contains the **built packages**;
- log/ (autogenerated), which contains the **build logs**;
- src/, which contains the **source code** of all packages.

If you use Git, remember to add build/, install/, and log/ to your .gitignore file!

Similarly, colcon ignores them when recursively looking for packages to build.

The workspace

Package creation

In the beginning was

```
ros2 pkg create <package_name>
```

which has way too many options. The main ones are:

- `--destination-directory src/`
- `--build-type <build_type>` (`ament_cmake` or `ament_python`)
- `--dependencies <package_name> ...`

Roadmap

1 ROS 2 development workflow

2 C++ bootstrap

3 Message topics

Code examples

Find all course materials on **GitHub** at [ros2-examples](#) (humble branch).

The repository is organized as a **ROS 2 workspace** ready to be built, and intended to support [Visual Studio Code](#) as **IDE**. Find all information in [README.md](#).

It is also organized with **Docker containers** in mind, and supports the automated build of development containers in VS Code.

Such containers are based on our [Distributed Unified Architecture](#) project, which is part of Roberto Masocco's PhD thesis.

Their inner workings are totally transparent, but if you're curious see [dua_template.md](#).

Suggestion: clone it and set up your branch locally, to be still able to get and merge updates.

C++ fundamentals

Back to basics

C++ has been developed from C, and is a **compiled, strongly-typed** (mostly) language. Its main features began as extensions of C to support modern **object-oriented programming** and **generic programming** paradigms, but it has evolved into much more.

In order to get started with ROS 2, a minimal subset of its features is required.
Dust off your C programming skills, then add:

- **Object-oriented programming**
- **Namespaces**
- **Templates**
- **Smart pointers**

C++ fundamentals

Object-oriented programming

```
1 class MyClass : public ParentClass
2 {
3     public:
4         MyClass();
5         // ...
6     protected:
7         // ...
8     private:
9         // ...
10 };
```

Listing 1: Example of definition of a C++ class.

Pay attention to inheritance rules.

C++ fundamentals

Namespaces

Subdivision of the global namespace to avoid naming collisions between multiple libraries, resolved with the **:: operator**.

```
1 MyLib::foo();  
2 MyClass::foo();  
3 // Completely different names for the compiler!
```

Listing 2: Example of namespaces usage.

Names may become very long, so usually they are hidden with `typedef`.

C++ fundamentals

Templates

Classes or functions whose **implementation depends on some data type**.

When instantiated or called with a specific type, **the corresponding code is generated by the compiler**.

```
1 std::vector<int> int_vector;
2 std::vector<double> double_vector;
```

Listing 3: Example of objects of the template class `std::vector`.

These too make names very long, so are usually `typedef'd`.

C++ fundamentals

Shared pointers

A kind of **smart pointer** (there are also unique and weak) that also holds an **usage counter**, incremented by every function or object that is handling the pointer.

When the shared_ptr is destroyed, if the counter is zero the pointed object is also destroyed and its memory deallocated.

```
1 {
2     // A new scope starts here
3     std::shared_ptr<rclcpp::Node> node =
4         std::make_shared<rclcpp::Node>("my_node");
5 }
6 // Here the node and its pointer have been destroyed!
```

Listing 4: Example of shared pointer creation.

Obviously `std::shared_ptr` is a template class. ROS 2 heavily relies on them, and the `SharedPtr` alias is frequently defined.

Roadmap

1 ROS 2 development workflow

2 C++ bootstrap

3 Message topics

ROS 2 messages

A message is a **single DDS data packet** sent over a **topic**, from **publisher nodes** to **subscriber nodes**, with a specific **QoS policy**.

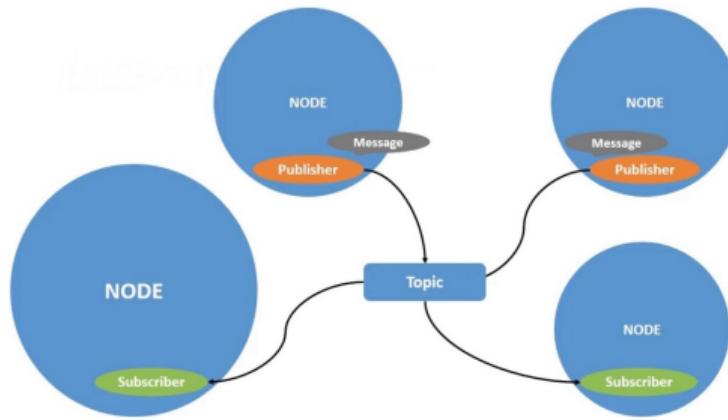


Figure 3: Example of a topic with multiple publisher and subscriber nodes.

Figure 3 is also an example of a simple **node graph**, a pivotal concept in a distributed context.

Interface files

Messages

Interface files format is **specified by the DDS standard**, with data types resolved to machine types according to the platform being used¹.

Message file names end with `.msg`.

Things start very simply...

```
1 int64 data
```

Listing 5: Definition of the std_msgs/msg/Int64 message.

```
1 string data
```

Listing 6: Definition of the std_msgs/msg/String message.

¹[About ROS 2 interfaces](#) (ROS 2 Humble docs)

Interface files

Messages

... then escalate quickly!

```
1 std_msgs/Header header
2
3 uint32 height
4 uint32 width
5
6 string encoding
7
8 uint8 is_bigendian
9 uint32 step
10 uint8[] data
```

Listing 7: Definition of the sensor_msgs/msg/Image composite message.

Special values (*i.e.*, **constants**) may be specified.

```
1 int64 MYNUM=1 # Must be of compatible type
2
3 int64 number
```

Listing 8: Definition of an example message with a constant value.

They are not bound to any field and will appear as **special selectable values** in the generated C++/Python libraries.

ROS 2 adds its own **guidelines**², and installed interfaces can be inspected with

```
ros2 interface show
```

²[ros2-examples/interfaces.md](#)

Message topics

Quality of Service

A **QoS policy** for publishers/subscribers is a data structure with the following attributes:

- **History** (*keep last N or all*)
- **Depth** (queue size N)
- **Reliability** (*best-effort* or *reliable*, default: reliable)
- **Durability** (publishers resend all messages to "late-joiners")
- Deadline
- **Lifespan** (message expiration date)
- Liveliness
- Lease duration

Default **profiles** are available (e.g. **Sensor data**, **Service...**), see the [docs](#).

Message topics

Inspection tools

The command line tool `ros2 topic` can be used to **inspect topics** and related entities. It has a lot of **verbs**, the most important ones are:

- `list` (list all topics)
- `echo` (print messages to the console)
- `pub` (publish messages from the console)
- `hz` (print publishing rate and statistics)
- `info` (print information about a topic)
- `type` (print the message type)

each with many useful options.

Nodes can be inspected with the `ros2 node` command, and its many verbs.

New features in Humble

Message topics

ROS 2 Humble Hawksbill introduces software support for the following **new topic features**:

- **Type adaptation**: when a node subscribes or publishes to a topic, it can define routines to **automatically convert messages** to/from a different type.
- **Type negotiation**: when a node subscribes or publishes to a topic, it can **negotiate with other nodes the data type** to be used; this feature is being implemented in a **decentralized** fashion.
- **Content filtering**: when a node subscribes to a topic, it can specify that it requires only a **subset of the message fields** to be delivered.

New features in Humble

Type adaptation on hardware accelerators

Figure 4: Type adaptation in an Nvidia Jetson image processing pipeline.

Example

Topic pub/sub

Now go have a look at the [ros2-examples/src/cpp/topic_pubsub_cpp](#) package!

Exercises

- Install ROS 2 on a platform of your choice.
- Run the [demo nodes](#).
- Inspect the demo topics.
- Interact with the demo nodes from the command line.
- Clone [ros2-examples](#) and rebuild the topic_pubsub_cpp package.
- Listen to the /rosout topic from the command line.