ROS 2

Workflow and basic communication

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Recap

ROS 2 is a **DDS**-based (for now!), 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 evolving rapidly towards the best practices adopted in the **software industry** in the last 30 years.

This lecture is here.

Roadmap

1. ROS 2 development workflow
2. C++ bootstrap
3. Message topics

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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`.

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**, **shared objects** (libraries), and **include directories** installed by ROS 2, plus many **environment variables**.

Additional commands are required to set up **command line completion** and other useful 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** ($\geq$3.5, 3.10 works with Humble)

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

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 prioritizes other features with respect to 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, and is fully **expandable**.
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`.

Its configuration for a package can be found in the `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 specify the location of all **executable scripts** in the package.

Figure 2: setuptools logo.

The `colcon` command you will use the most 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 executables into the `install/` directory, instead of copying them (useful for Python packages);
- `--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 **build products**;
- `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> ...`

Most of this stuff can be specified afterwards, eventually modifying the `package.xml` file.

Roadmap

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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++ 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**

```cpp
class MyClass : public ParentClass
{
public:
  MyClass();
  // ...
protected:
  // ...
private:
  // ...
};
```

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

Pay attention to inheritance rules.

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

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

```cpp
namespace MyLib {
  void foo() { /* Does something */ }
} // This is typically done for libraries

class MyClass
{
public:
  void foo() { /* Does something as well */ }
} my_obj; // Watch out for the ';'!

MyLib::foo(); // This is calling foo from MyLib!
my_obj.foo(); // This is calling foo from MyClass!
```

Listing 2: Example of namespaces usage.

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**.

```
std::vector<int> int_vector;
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.

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.

```
{
  // A new scope starts here
  std::shared_ptr<rclcpp::Node> node =
    std::make_shared<rclcpp::Node>("my_node");
}
// 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.

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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**.

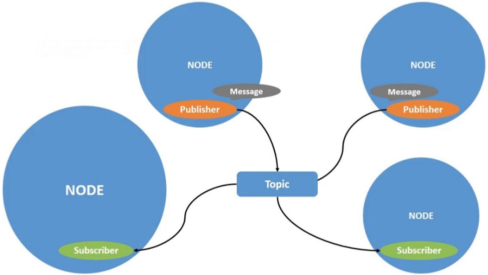

Figure 3: Example of a topic with multiple publisher and subscriber nodes.

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

Interface files format is **specified by the DDS standard**, with data types resolved to machine types according to the platform being used[1].
Message file names end with `.msg`.
Things start very simply...

```
int64 data
```

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

```
string data
```

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

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

... then escalate quickly!

```
std_msgs/Header header

uint32 height
uint32 width

string encoding

uint8 is_bigendian
uint32 step
uint8[] data
```

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

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

```
int64 MYNUM=1 # Must be of compatible type

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.

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.