

# COMP S380F Lecture 5: EL, JSTL, Custom tag

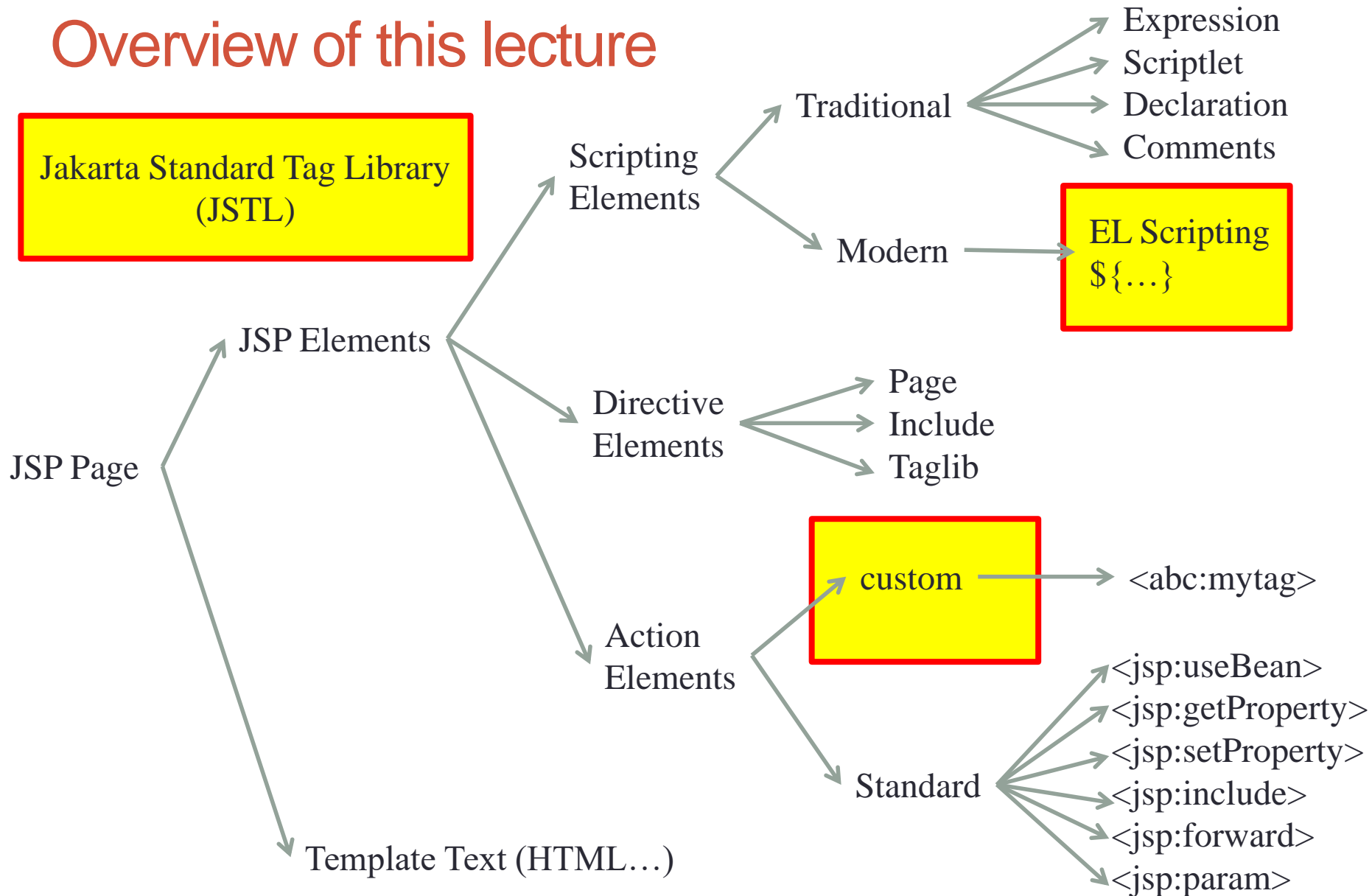
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# Overview of this lecture



# Overview of this lecture

- EL (Expression Language )
  - EL expression
  - EL implicit objects
  - Accessing scoped variables
  - dot operator & bracket [ ] operator
- JSTL (Jakarta Standard Tag Library)
  - **Core:** <c:forEach>, <c:if>, <c:choose>, <c:when>, <c:otherwise>, <c:set>, <c:url>, <c:param>
  - **Fn** (*but **Fmt**, **SQL**, **XML** are not covered*)
- JSP custom tags

# Motivating example for Expression Language (EL)

Problem of using `<jsp:useBean>`, `<jsp:get/setProperty>` in JSP

- XML syntax is verbose and clumsy (e.g., easy to miss a closing tag)
- Accessing sub-properties of a JavaBean is not supported

```
protected void doGet(...) {
    Dog dog = new Dog();
    dog.setName("Lucky");
    Person p = new Person();
    p.setName("Keith");
    p.setDog(dog);
    request.setAttribute("person", p);
    RequestDispatcher view =
        request.getRequestDispatcher("result.jsp");
    view.forward(request, response);
}
```

**Person**

- name: String
- dog: Dog

**Dog**

- name: String

result.jsp

```
<jsp:useBean id="person" class="package.Person" scope="request" />
My dog is: <%= person.getDog().getName() %>
```

# Expression Language (EL)

- JSP 2.3 lets you simplify the way of accessing Java code by using **Jakarta Unified Expression Language (EL)**.
- EL can replace scripting elements, useBean & get/setProperty actions.
  - Towards scriptless JSP
- Syntax: **`${ expression }`**
- E.g., the previous code in result.jsp:

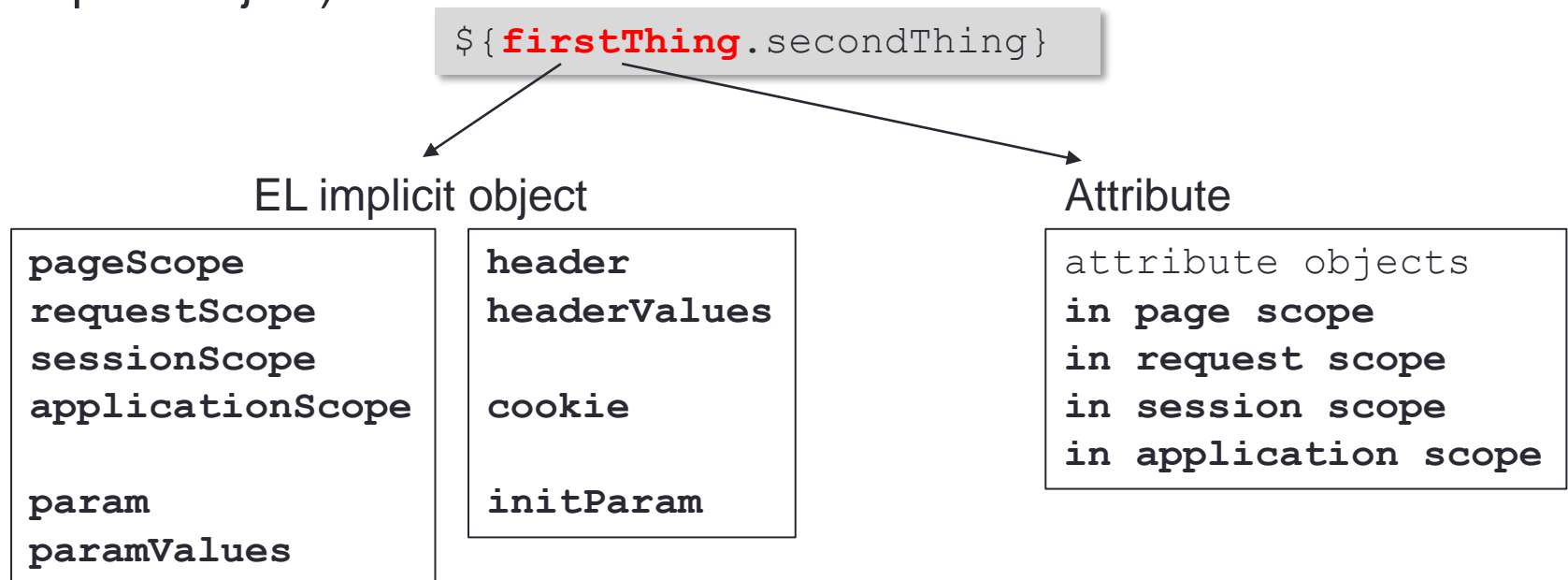
```
<jsp:useBean id="person" class="package.Person" scope="request" />  
My dog is: <%= person.getDog().getName() %>
```



```
My dog is: ${person.dog.name}
```

# EL Expression

- EL syntax: **`${ expression }`**
- The expression should **always evaluate to some value**  
e.g., `${105.509}`
- If the expression **starts with a named variable**, this variable must be either an **attribute** or an **EL implicit object** (which is different to JSP implicit object).



# EL Properties

- Can be used anywhere **except** in JSP directives, and JSP declarations, scriptlets and expressions (as they expect Java code)
- It should **always evaluate to some value**.
- EL implicit objects (besides the JSP implicit objects)
- Easy access to

- Stored attributes

e.g., `session.setAttribute("subscription", "Monthly")`

Your subscription choice is: `${subscription}`

- Bean properties

e.g., `${person.name}`, `${person.dog.name}`

- Collections: accessing array or List or Map

e.g., `${orderItems[0]}`





# Accessing Scoped Variables

- Scoped Variables (Attributes): name-value pair

Scope	Location of storage
page	PageContext object (which is not shared)
request	HttpServletRequest object
session	HttpSession object
application	ServletContext object

- In each of the location, you could use `setAttribute()` / `getAttribute()` to store / retrieve the name-value attribute pairs.

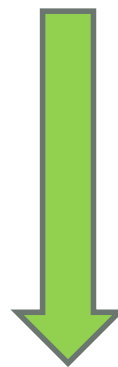
```
request.setAttribute("customerLocation","Hong Kong"); // a String  
request.setAttribute("ShoppingCart", cart); // an object
```

- EL gives you an easy way to access these scoped variables:

```
<p>You are shopping from : ${customerLocation}</p>  
<p>Total price is: ${ShoppingCart.total} </p>
```

## Accessing Scoped Variables (cont')

- We do not need to specify the scope of the variable in the expression.
- The attribute name in the expression `${attribute_name}` is searched in all four locations, in the search order:
  1. `PageContext`
  2. `HttpServletRequest`
  3. `HttpSession`
  4. `ServletContext`
- Choose unique names for the attribute if you don't want the container to be confused, or return an unexpected answer.
- In case, you need to access an attribute of a particular scope. You can use the EL implicit object.  
E.g., `${requestScope.attribute_name}`, `${sessionScope.attribute_name}`



from specific to general

# dot operator

If the expression has a variable followed by a dot (.):

`${person.name}`

```
graph TD; A["${person.name}"] --> B["left-hand variable"]; A --> C["right-hand variable"];
```

left-hand variable

- `java.util.Map` (something with a key), or
- A bean (something with properties)

right-hand variable

- a Map key, or
- a bean property

Must be a **Java name**,  
e.g.,

- ✓ Cannot start with a number
- ✓ Cannot be a Java keyword
- ✓ No spaces

## dot operator (cont')

Lecture05 web app: branch [lecture05](https://github.com/cskeith/380_2024.git) of [https://github.com/cskeith/380\\_2024.git](https://github.com/cskeith/380_2024.git)

Consider the following request attribute “dinnerMap”:

Servlet

```
Map<String, String> dinnerMap = new ConcurrentHashMap<>();  
dinnerMap.put("Chinese", "Green River");  
dinnerMap.put("Japanese", "Sushi Express");  
dinnerMap.put("Hongkong", "Australia Dairy");  
request.setAttribute("dinnerMap", dinnerMap);
```

key	value
"Chinese"	"Green River"
"Japanese"	"Sushi Express"
"Hongkong"	"Australia Dairy"

- `${dinnerMap.Chinese}` prints Green River
- For beans and Maps, using dot (.) operator is good enough.
- For a bean “person” with property “name”, the following ELs are the same:
  - `${person.name}`
  - `${person["name"]}`

# bracket [ ] operator

If EL has a variable followed by a bracket [ ]:

`${person[name]}`



```
graph TD; A["${person[name]}"] --> B["• java.util.Map, a bean, a List, or an array"]; A --> C["• a Map key, a bean property, a List index, or array index."];
```

- `java.util.Map`, a bean, a List, or an array

- a Map key, a bean property, a List index, or array index.

About the value inside [ ]:

- The value can be a string literal (i.e., "value")
  - E.g., `${dinnerMap["Chinese"]}`
- If there are no quotes, the value is treated as an attribute and evaluated
  - E.g., `${dinnerMap[Chinese]}`
  - It finds an attribute named **Chinese**. Then, use the value of that attribute as the key into the Map, or return null.
  - Since there is no attribute called **Chinese** in any of the 4 scopes, this EL does not work and returns null.

# bracket [ ] operator (cont')

Consider the two request attributes “dinnerMap” and “DinnerType”:

```

Map<String, String> dinnerMap = new ConcurrentHashMap<>();
dinnerMap.put("Chinese", "Green River");
dinnerMap.put("Japanese", "Sushi Express");
dinnerMap.put("Hongkong", "Australia Dairy");
request.setAttribute("dinnerMap", dinnerMap);

String[] dinnerTypes = {"Chinese", "Japanese", "Hongkong"};
request.setAttribute("DinnerType", dinnerTypes);

```

Servlet

dinnerMap:

key	value
"Chinese"	"Green River"
"Japanese"	"Sushi Express"
"Hongkong"	"Australia Dairy"

DinnerType:

index	value
0	"Chinese"
1	"Japanese"
2	"Hongkong"

JSP page:

```
${dinnerMap[DinnerType[0]]}
```

```
→ ${dinnerMap["Chinese"]}
```

```
→ Green River
```

**URL:**

<Lecture05 base URL>/operator

# bracket [ ] operator: Access collections

- Bracket [ ] operator gives you a uniform way of accessing collections.
  - The dot operator requires you to know the key/property in advance.
  - But the [ ] operator can accept a variable that will be evaluated at run time (because the *unquoted* values inside [ ] are evaluated).

<Lecture05 base URL>/display\_names.jsp

```
<%@ page contentType="text/html" pageEncoding="UTF-8"%>
<%@ page import="java.util.*, java.util.concurrent.*" %>
<%

    String[] firstNames = {"Elon", "Bill", "Mark"};
    List<String> lastNames = new CopyOnWriteArrayList<>();
    lastNames.add("Musk");
    lastNames.add("Gates");
    lastNames.add("Zuckerberg");
    Map<String, String> companyNames = new ConcurrentHashMap<>();
    companyNames.put("Gates", "Microsoft");
    companyNames.put("Musk", "Tesla");
    companyNames.put("Zuckerberg", "Meta");
    request.setAttribute("first", firstNames);
    request.setAttribute("last", lastNames);
    request.setAttribute("company", companyNames);

%>
```

# Using [ ] operator: Access collections (cont')

<Lecture05 base URL>/display\_names.jsp (cont')

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Accessing Collections with EL</title>
  </head>
  <body>
    <h1>Accessing Collections with EL</h1>
    <ul>
      <li>${first[0]} ${last[0]} (${company[last[0]]})</li>
      <li>${first[1]} ${last[1]} (${company[last[1]]})</li>
      <li>${first[2]} ${last[2]} (${company[last[2]]})</li>
    </ul>
  </body>
</html>
```

## Accessing Collections with EL

- Elon Musk (Tesla)
- Bill Gates (Microsoft)
- Mark Zuckerberg (Meta)



# EL Implicit Objects

EL provides its own implicit objects.

- Most of them are Maps.
- Not to be confused with *JSP implicit objects*.

## **param & paramValues:**

- Let you access the primary request parameter (param), or
- The array of request parameter values (paramValues).

## **header & headerValues:**

- Let you access the primary and complete HTTP request header values.
- Some of the value names must be enclosed with [ ], e.g., "User-Agent".

## **initParam:**

- Let you access context initialization parameters.

## EL Implicit Objects (cont')

### **cookie:**

- Let you refer to incoming cookies.
- The return value is a **Cookie** object. This means to access its value, you have to get the **value** property (using the `getValue()` method).

### **pageScope, requestScope, sessionScope, applicationScope:**

- These objects let you restrict where the system looks for scoped variable.
  - E.g., `${requestScope.name}` only looks into `HttpServletRequest`

### **pageContext:**

- Object that represents current page.
- This object has `request`, `response`, `session`, and `servletContext` properties.
  - E.g., `${pageContext.session.id}`

# EL Implicit Object: Example

<Lecture05 base URL>/el\_implicit.jsp

```
<h1>Using EL implicit objects</h1>
<ul>
  <li>Request parameter called <code>test</code>: ${param.test}</li>
  <li>User-agent info in request header: ${header["User-Agent"]}</li>
  <li>Cookie (JSESSIONID) value: ${cookie.JSESSIONID.value}</li>
  <li>Server info: ${pageContext.servletContext.serverInfo}</li>
  <li>Request method: ${pageContext.request.method}</li>
</ul>
```

<Lecture05 base URL>/el\_implicit.jsp?test=Hello+World

## Using EL implicit objects

- Request parameter called `test`: Hello World
- User-agent info in request header: Mozilla/5.0 (Windows NT 10.0; Win64;
- Cookie (JSESSIONID) value: 5DF3EC365A04241F770C4F5B01F44D54
- Server info: Apache Tomcat/10.1.5
- Request method: GET

# EL Operators

Category	Operators
Arithmetic	+, -, *, / (div), % (mod)
Relational	== (eq), != (ne), < (lt), > (gt), <= (le), >= (ge)
Logical	&& (and),    (or), ! (not)
Validation	empty

Examples:

```
${item.price * (1 + taxRate[user.address.zipcode])}
```

```
${empty param.userName}
```

# Jakarta Standard Tag Library (JSTL)

- JSP actions and EL allows you to remove bulk of JSP scripting elements.
- However, you may need more functionality, something beyond what you can get with JSP actions and EL.
  - E.g., EL has no control-flow statements.
- Imagine that your JSP is expecting a **userName** parameter.
- If it does not exist, you want to call another JSP that will ask for **userName** from the user. That is, you want to check for some conditions...

We are sorry ... you need to log in again.


Name:

- You may have to resort to scripting again...

# JSTL Motivating Example

<Lecture05 base URL>/hello\_user1.jsp

```
<body>
  Welcome to your page!
  <% if (request.getParameter("userName") == null) { %>
    <jsp:forward page="CollectName.jsp" />
  <% } %>
  Hello ${param.userName}.
</body>
```



<Lecture05 base URL>/CollectName.jsp

```
<body>
  We are sorry ... you need to log in again.
  <form action="hello_user1.jsp" method="get">
    Name: <input name="userName" type="text" />
    <input name="Submit" type="submit" />
  </form>
</body>
```

We are sorry ... you need to log in again.  
Name:

## JSTL Motivating Example (cont')

- JSP provides a set of tag library for performing tasks that are common in programming.
- With JSTL and EL, you can do just about everything without using JSP scripting elements.
  - JSTL is not part of the JSP specification.
- Here is how you might handle the conditional forward with JSTL:  
(You need to update CollectName.jsp to go to hello\_user2.jsp)

<Lecture05 base URL>/hello\_user2.jsp

```
<%@ taglib prefix="c" uri="jakarta.tags.core" %>
...
<body>
    Welcome to your page!
    <c:if test="${empty param.userName}" >
        <jsp:forward page="CollectName.jsp" />
    </c:if>
    Hello ${param.userName}.
</body>
```

# JSTL Major Libraries

The JSTL consists of the following major libraries.

- *Core*: (programming-like) actions.  
`<%@ taglib uri="jakarta.tags.core" prefix="c" %>`
  - You may also use `"http://java.sun.com/jsp/jstl/core"` as the uri.
- *Fmt*: Formatting and internationalization.  
`<%@ taglib uri="jakarta.tags.fmt" prefix="fmt" %>`
- *SQL*: SQL database actions.  
`<%@ taglib uri="jakarta.tags.sql" prefix="sql" %>`
- *XML*: XML processing actions.  
`<%@ taglib uri="jakarta.tags.xml" prefix="x" %>`
- *Fn*: Functions.  
`<%@ taglib uri="jakarta.tags.functions" prefix="fn" %>`

More details: <https://jakarta.ee/specifications/tags/3.0/tagdocs/>



# Looping Collections: JSP scripting

- Suppose you want to print the array content in an HTML table.

```
String[] companyList = {"Tesla", "Microsoft", "Meta"};  
request.setAttribute("companyList", companyList);
```

- Using JSP scripting:

<Lecture05 base URL>/c\_forEach.jsp

```
<h2>JSP scripting</h2>  
<ul>  
<%  
    String[] companies = (String[]) request.getAttribute("companyList");  
    for (String company : companies) {  
%>  
        <li><%= company %></li>  
<%    } %>  
</ul>
```

# Looping Collections: <c:forEach>

- Suppose you want to print the array content in an HTML table.

```
String[] companyList = {"Tesla", "Microsoft", "Meta"};  
request.setAttribute("companyList", companyList);
```

- The JSTL tag **<c:forEach>** allows you to **loop through** the entire companyList array (i.e., companyList attribute) and print each element.

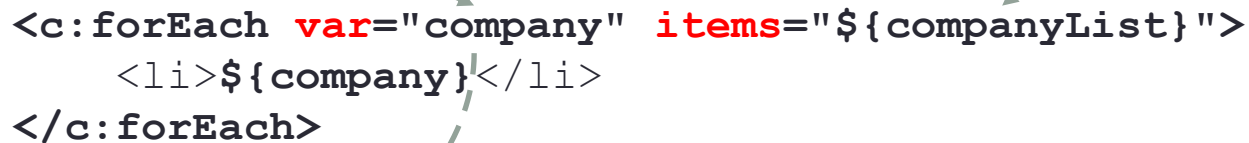
<Lecture05 base URL>/c\_forEach.jsp

```
<%@ taglib prefix="c" uri="jakarta.tags.core" %>  
...  
<h2>JSTL</h2>  
<ul>  
    <c:forEach var="company" items="${companyList}">  
        <li>${company}</li>  
    </c:forEach>  
</ul>
```

# Looping Collections: <c:forEach> (cont')

The variable that holds  
each element in the collection.  
It's value changes with each iteration.

Thing to loop over  
(Array, Collection, Map)



```
<c:forEach var="company" items="${companyList}">  
  <li>${company}</li>  
</c:forEach>
```

```
String[] companies = (String[]) request.getAttribute("companyList");  
for (String company : companies) {  
    out.println(company);  
}
```

## Conditional output: <c:if>

- The JSTL tag <c:if> allows you to have conditional output, e.g., only display a comment form for members with full access right.
- Suppose we have the attributes `commentList` and `memberType`.

```
<%@ taglib prefix="c" uri="jakarta.tags.core" %>
<html><body>
<ul>
  <c:forEach var="comment" items="${commentList}">
    <li>${comment}</li>
  </c:forEach>
</ul>
<hr>
<c:if test="${memberType eq 'full_access'}">
  Add your comments
  <form action="postcomment.jsp" method="post">
    <textarea name="input" cols="40" rows="10"></textarea>
    <input type="submit" value="Add comment" />
  </form>
</c:if>
```

## Conditional output: <c:choose>, <c:when>, <c:otherwise>

- There is no “else” construct in JSTL.
- To **check for multiple tests**, we use **<c:choose>**, **<c:when>**, **<c:otherwise>**.

```
<%@ taglib prefix="c" uri="jakarta.tags.core" %>
...
<c:choose>
  <c:when test="${pageContext.request.scheme eq 'http'}">
    This is an insecure Web session.
  </c:when>
  <c:when test="${pageContext.request.scheme eq 'https'}">
    This is a secure Web session.
  </c:when>
  <c:otherwise>
    You are using an unrecognized Web protocol. How did this happen?!
  </c:otherwise>
</c:choose>
```

# Setting attribute / map / bean: <c:set>

<c:set> tag comes in two flavours: **var** and **target**

1. This code sets an attribute in a scope (i.e., like setAttribute() method).

```
<c:set var="userLevel" scope="session" value="full_access" />  
<c:set var="Lucky" scope="request" value="${person.dog}" />
```

2. This code sets a Map value and a property of a bean.

```
<c:set target="${person}" property="name" value="Keith" />  
<c:set target="${PetMap}" property="dogName" value="Lucky" />
```

- person is a bean and its name property is set to “Keith”
- PetMap is a Map and the value of the key “dogName” is set to “Lucky”.

## Setting attribute / map / bean: <c:set> (cont')

```
<c:set var="Lucky" scope="request" value="${person.dog}" />
```

- **scope** is optional and is used only for **var**; the default is **page** scope.
- If the value evaluates to null, the attribute Lucky will be removed from the scope.
- If the attribute Lucky does not exist, it will be created (only if the value is not null).

```
<c:set target="${person}" property="name" value="Keith" />
```

- The **target** must be an expression which evaluates to the **Object** (not the String "id" name of the bean or Map).
- The container throws an exception, if
  - the target expression is null, or
  - the target expression is not a Map or a bean.

## Working with URL using <c:url>

- Suppose your web app has a base URL <http://www.example.org/forums/>.
- If you place the following hyperlink in your JSP page

```
<a href="/forum.jsp">Product Forum</a>
```

the user will be taken to <http://www.example.org/forum.jsp>

- This URL is relative to the server URL, not the web app's base URL.
- If you actually want <http://www.example.org/forums/forum.jsp>, use:

```
<a href="<c:url value="/forum.jsp" />">Product Forum</a>
```

- **<c:url>** properly encodes URLs, and rewrites them if necessary to add the session ID, and can also output URLs in your JSP.
- It saves the trouble of worrying about what base URL your application is deployed to.



# Working with URL using `<c:url>` & `<c:param>`

```
<c:set var="first" value="Tai Man" />
<c:set var="last" value="Chan" />
...
<c:url value="/nextpage.jsp?first=${first}&last=${last}" />
```

- The URL created by `<c:url>` is invalid due to the space in “Tai Man”.
- `<c:param>`** can be used to encode the query parameters in `<c:url>` properly:

```
<c:url value="/nextpage.jsp" var="nextURL">
  <c:param name="first" value="${first}" />
  <c:param name="last" value="${last}" />
</c:url>
```

- Note the use of **`var`** in `<c:url>`, which allows us to reuse the URL, e.g.,

```
<a href="${nextURL}">Next page</a>
```

# JSTL: Functions

## `${fn:contains(String, String)}`

- test whether the first string contains one or more instances of the second string and returns **true** if it does.

## `${fn:escapeXml(String)}`

- If a string you are outputting could contain special characters, you can use this function to escape those special characters.
  - E.g., `${fn:escapeXml("<p>")}` becomes **&lt;p&gt;**
  - Especially useful for **preventing cross-site scripting (XSS) attacks**.

## `${fn:join(String[], String)}`

- Join an array of strings together using the specified string as a delimiter.
  - E.g., `${fn:join(emailArray, ",")}`

# JSTL: Functions (cont')

## **`${fn:length(Object)}`**

- If Object is a string, it returns the result of calling the length method on the specified string.
- If Object is a Collection, Map, or array, it returns the size of that Collection, Map, or array.
- No other object types are supported.

## **`${fn:toLowerCase(String)}`, `${fn:toUpperCase(String)}`**

- Change the case of a string to all lowercase or all uppercase.

## **`${fn:trim(String)}`**

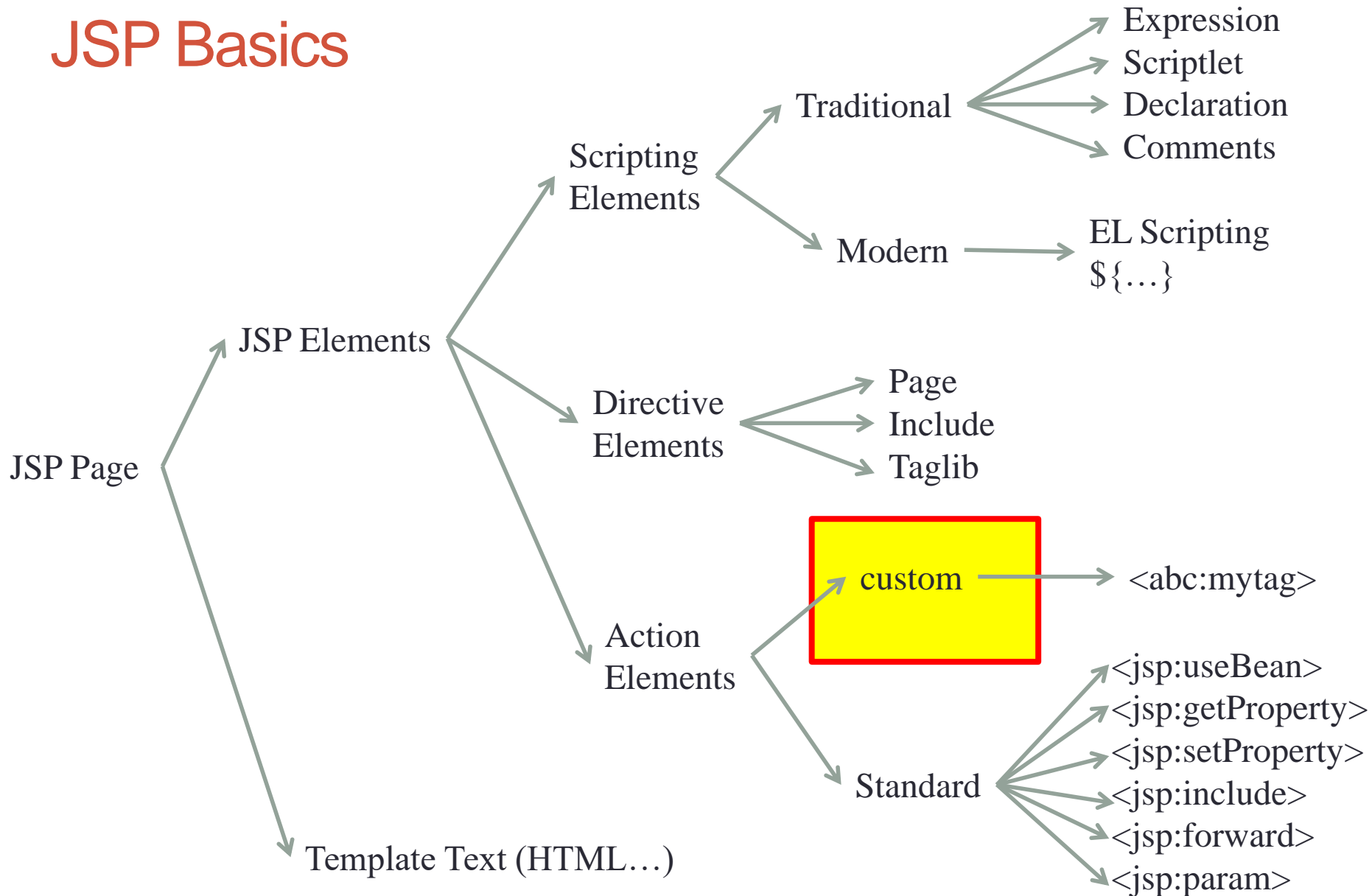
- Trim all white space from both ends of the specified string.

## Other things available in JSTL

- More tags are available in JSTL. You can learn it online, e.g., <https://jakarta.ee/specifications/tags/3.0/jakarta-tags-spec-3.0.html>

Core	Formatting tools	XML tools
<c:out>	<fmt:formatNumber>	<x:parse>
<c:catch>	<fmt:parseDate>	<x:forEach>
<c:redirect>	<fmt:setTimeZone>	<x:transform>
<c:import>	<fmt:parseNumber>	<x:param>
<c:remove>	<fmt:setLocale>	<x:if>
<c:forTokens>	<fmt:message>	<x:out>
...	...	...

# JSP Basics



# JSP Custom Tags

- Tags are understood by a program that “reads” them; i.e., the program knows what to do with tags.

- E.g., HTML tags are understood by browsers:

`<a href="index.html">My homepage</a>`

`<h1>My page title</h1>`

- General Syntax of tags:

**`<tagName attributeName="attValue">Body Text</tagName>`**

- JSP allows you to create your own tags.
  - The behaviour of a custom tag is implemented by a Java class, called TagHandler.
  - When the JSP engine encounters a custom tag, it executes the Java code that implements the behaviour.

# JSP Custom Tags: Example

TagHandler

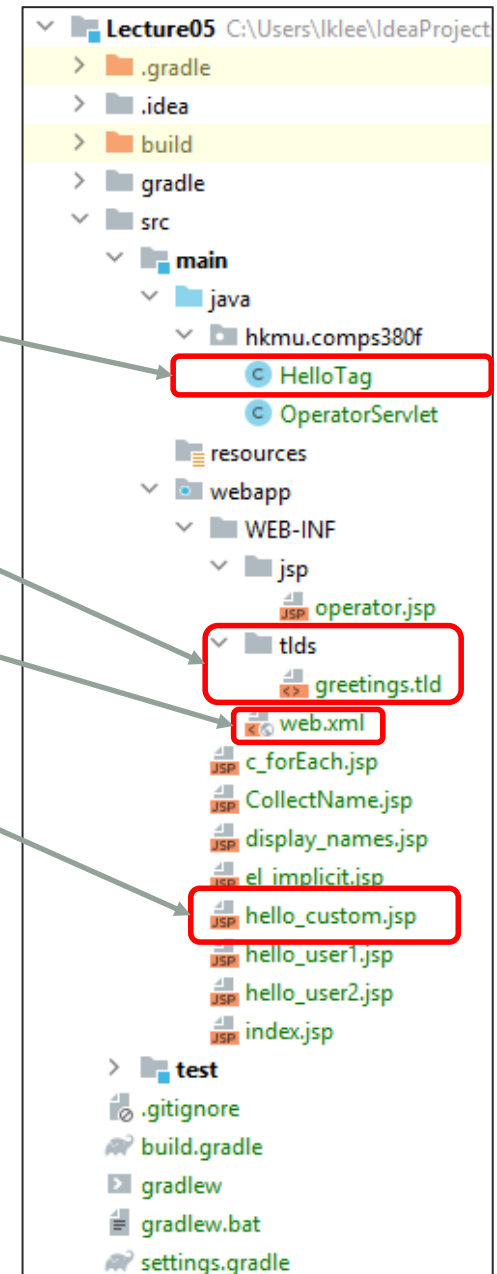
Tag Library Descriptor

Deployment descriptor

JSP page that uses the custom tag

## Greeting!

Hi Tommy  
My dearest Elon  
Now look here Mark  
Now look here Keith  
My dearest Bill



# JSP Custom Tags: JSP page

<Lecture05 base URL>/hello\_custom.jsp

```
<%@page contentType="text/html" pageEncoding="UTF-8"%>
<%@taglib prefix="greet" uri="comps380f.hkmu.edu/greetings/HelloTag" %>
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Greetings!</title>
  </head>
  <body>
    <h1>Greeting!</h1>
    <greet:hello form="brief" />Tommy<br />
    <greet:hello form="effusive" />Elon<br />
    <greet:hello form="serious" />Mark<br />
    <greet:hello form="serious" />Keith<br />
    <greet:hello form="effusive" />Bill<br />
  </body>
</html>
```

## Greeting!

Hi Tommy  
My dearest Elon  
Now look here Mark  
Now look here Keith  
My dearest Bill



# JSP Custom Tags: Tag Library Descriptor

- The custom tag is declared in a Tag Library Descriptor: /WEB-INF/tlds/greetings.tld.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<taglib version="3.1" ...>
  <tlib-version>1.0</tlib-version>
  <short-name>greet</short-name>
  <!-- Ways of saying Hello. -->
  <uri>comps380f.hkmu.edu/greetings/HelloTag</uri>
  <tag>
    <name>hello</name>
    <tag-class>hkmu.comps380f.HelloTag</tag-class>
    <body-content>empty</body-content>
    <!-- Say hello. -->
    <attribute>
      <name>form</name>
      <required>true</required>
    </attribute>
  </tag>
</taglib>
```

# JSP Custom Tags: TagHandler

- Actions associated with the tags are implemented: HelloTag.java

```
public class HelloTag extends SimpleTagSupport {  
    private String form;  
  
    @Override  
    public void doTag() throws JspException {  
        JspWriter out = getJspContext().getOut();  
  
        try {  
            String greeting = null;  
            if (form.equals("brief")) greeting = "Hi";  
            if (form.equals("effusive")) greeting = "My dearest";  
            if (form.equals("serious")) greeting = "Now look here";  
            out.print(greeting + " ");  
        } catch (java.io.IOException ex) {  
            throw new JspException("Error in HelloTag tag", ex);  
        }  
    }  
  
    public void setForm(String form) {  
        this.form = form;  
    }  
}
```

# JSP Custom Tags: Deployment Descriptor

- In the deployment descriptor (web.xml):

```
<jsp-config>  
  <taglib>  
    <taglib-uri>comps380f.hkmu.edu/greetings/HelloTag</taglib-uri>  
    <taglib-location>/WEB-INF/tlds/greetings.tld</taglib-location>  
  </taglib>  
</jsp-config>
```

# JSP Custom Tags: Summary

