

Proxy Pattern

This lesson discusses how objects can act on behalf of other objects without the clients knowing they aren't talking to the intended object.

What is it ?

The literal definition of proxy is ***the authority to represent someone else***. In a proxy pattern setup, a proxy is responsible for representing another object called the **subject** in front of clients. The real subject is shielded from interacting directly with the clients. There could be several reasons why one would want to front a subject with a proxy, some are listed below:

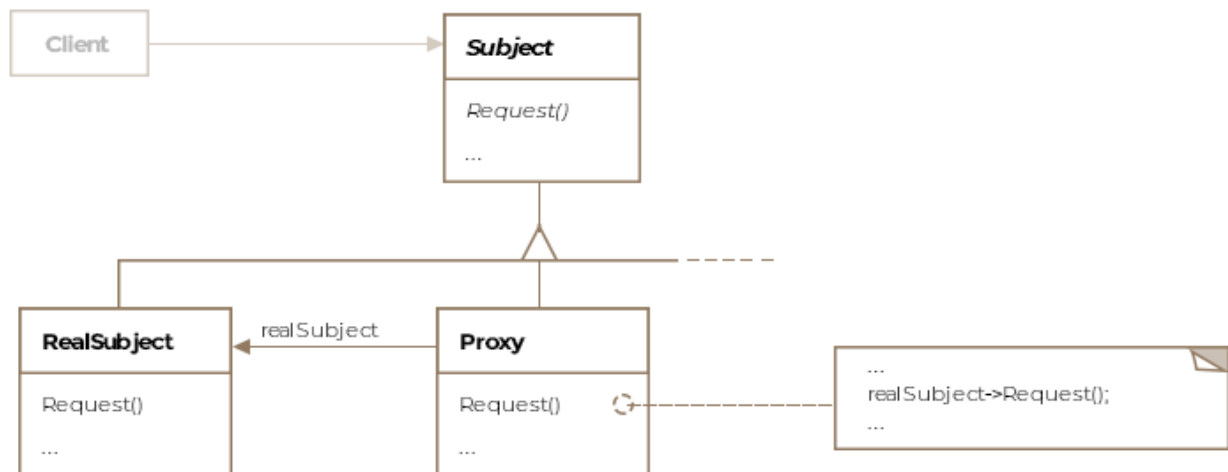
- To access remote objects over the internet, running in another JVM or another address space
- To protect a subject from clients not authorized to access it
- To stand in place of an object that may be expensive to create and delay the object's creation till it is accessed
- To cache queries or results from subject for clients
- There are a number of other use cases such as the firewall proxy, synchronization proxy etc.

Formally, the pattern is defined as ***a mechanism to provide a surrogate or placeholder for another object to control access to it.***

Class Diagram

The class diagram consists of the following entities

- **Proxy**
- **Subject**
- **Real Subject**



Class Diagram

Remote Proxy

An ambassador appointed by a country to another acts like a proxy for his/her country. He or she acts as the communication channel between the host country and the ambassador's country. A remote proxy acts in a somewhat similar fashion and facilitates interaction between the client and the subject. A remote proxy stands in place of an object which isn't running on the same machine or JVM. The client doesn't know that it is not talking to the subject but a proxy. The proxy and the subject implement the same interface allowing the client to invoke the same methods on the proxy as it would have invoked on the subject. The proxy then sends the request for the method invocation along with the method arguments over the network to the remote subject.

The subject doesn't have the intelligence built into it to receive the method invocation request over the network and usually, a helper entity runs alongside the remote subject and handles network communication

on behalf of the subject. Once the method invocation request is received, the helper entity forwards it to the subject, which in turn executes the method with the passed-in arguments. The results are then ferried back over the network to the proxy. The proxy in turn returns the results to the client.

Virtual Proxy

A virtual proxy creates objects on demand. Sometimes creation of an object is expensive and complex and should only be created when required. A virtual proxy delays creation of its subject until required and stands in its place before and during its construction.

Think of instagram running on a very weak internet connection on a mobile phone. The pictures aren't loaded quickly enough but to ensure a pleasant user experience, a *loading widget* can appear on the mobile screen while the image gets downloaded in the background. The *loading widget* would act as a proxy for the picture and might have related information about the picture such as the dimensions of the picture, which it can provide to the display frame before the picture download is complete.

Protection Proxy

A protection proxy or authorization proxy controls access to the real subject. Requests are vetted for authorization before being forwarded to the real subject. These proxies are useful when clients should have different access rights to the subject.

Example

We'll show a simple example of a remote proxy.

Consider a **drone** that is being flown by a pilot on the ground. The drone can be thought of as the subject, while the ground cockpit can consist of a proxy that receives actions from the physical controls in the cockpit and forwards them to the remote drone's software.

The **DroneProxy** and the actual subject **Drone** will both implement the same interface **IDrone**. The client will talk with the drone proxy without knowing that it is not talking to the real subject. The drone proxy would in turn forward requests from the client to the real drone object running in the flying drone's computer memory over a wireless connection. The action taken on the ground by the pilot against the drone proxy will be mimicked by the flying drone.

The simplistic drone interface can be:

```
public interface IDrone {  
  
    void turnLeft();  
  
    void turnRight();  
  
    void firstMissile();  
}
```

The code for the **DroneProxy** appears below:

```
public class DroneProxy implements IDrone {  
  
    @Override  
    public void turnLeft() {  
        // forward request to the real drone to  
        // turn left over the internet  
    }  
  
    @Override  
    public void turnRight() {  
        // forward request to the real drone to  
        // turn right over the internet  
    }  
  
    @Override
```

```

    public void firstMissile() {
        // forward request to the real drone to
        // fire missile
    }
}

```

The client code will be like so:

```

public class Client {

    public void main(DroneProxy droneProxy) {

        // perpetual loop that received pilot actions
        while (true) {

            Scanner scanner = new Scanner(System.in);
            String action = scanner.nextLine();

            switch (action) {
                case "left": {
                    droneProxy.turnLeft();
                    break;
                }

                case "right": {
                    droneProxy.turnRight();
                    break;
                }

                case "fire": {
                    droneProxy.firstMissile();
                    break;
                }

                default:
                    System.out.println("Invalid Action");
            }
        }
    }
}

```

The object of class `Drone` which will be part of the code that runs on the hardware of the flying drone and controls its flight may look like below:

```

public class Drone implements IDrone {

```

```

public class Drone implements IDrone {

    @Override
    public void turnLeft() {
        // receives the request and any method parameters
        // over the internet to turn the drone to its left.
    }

    @Override
    public void turnRight() {
        // receives the request and any method parameters
        // over the internet to turn the drone to its right.
    }

    @Override
    public void firstMissile() {
        // receives the request and any method parameters
        // over the internet to fire a missile
    }
}

```

Note we have skipped the technological details for transmitting the request and the method parameters over the wire as they may vary from language to language and don't affect the spirit of the pattern.

Other Examples

- `java.lang.reflect.Proxy` is an example of the proxy pattern.
- `java.rmi.*` package contains classes for creating proxies. RMI is Remote Method Invocation. It is a mechanism that enables an object on one Java virtual machine to invoke methods on an object in another Java virtual machine. RMI uses *marshalling* to send method parameters over the wire and the subject *unmarshalls* them back into objects.

Caveats

- A proxy may also be responsible for additional house-keeping tasks such as deleting the subject, keeping a reference count to the real subject or encoding requests before sending them to the real subject over the wire.