Static Site Generation

Lecture 19
What is Static Site Generation?

- Use a *program* to produce HTML pages
  - Analogous to compiling programs
  - Translation: source code → machine code

- Development cycle:
  - Write source
  - Compile
  - Test/inspect result

- Examples of translators
  - Jekyll (used for "GitHub Pages")
  - Middleman
  - Lots more, see: [staticsitegenerators.net](http://staticsitegenerators.net)
Picture

source files

generated web site
Middleman: A Ruby Gem

- Project is a directory (eg myproj)
  
  `$ middleman init myproj`
  
  - Configuration files, README, Gemfile, etc

- Create source files in `myproj/source`
  
  - Subdirectories for CSS, images, etc

- Compile all the source files
  
  `$ bundle exec middleman build`

- Result is placed in `myproj/build`

- Copy site to some visible location
  
  `$ rsync -avz --del myproj/build ~/WWW`

- Or preview locally (live reload, no build)
  
  `$ bundle exec middleman server`
Why Bother?

1. Code reuse and single-point-of-control over change
2. Authoring of content in a language that is more human-friendly
3. Parameterized generation of markup and content

Let's look at each of these benefits in turn...
Motivation #1: Visual Identity
Motivation #1: Visual Identity

- Common headers & footers
  - Example: OSU web sites share nav bar
  - Example: course web site
- Duplication of code is evil
  - Corollary: cut-and-paste is evil
  - Destroys single-point-of-control over change
- Solution:
  - Put common HTML in one file (a "partial")
  - Every document includes that file
ERb: Embedded Ruby

- General templating mechanism
  - "Template" = a string (usually contents of some file)
  - Contains (escaped) bits of ruby
    - `<% code %>` execute ruby code ("scriplet")
    - `<%= expr %>` replace with result of ruby expr
    - `<%# text %>` ignore (a comment)

- Example: a text file
  This is some text.
  `<% 5.times do %>`
  Current Time is `<%= Time.now %>`!
  `<% end %>`

- Process using erb tool to generate result
  `$ erb example.txt.erb > example.txt`

- Naming convention: `filename.outputlang.erb`
  - Example `index.html.erb`

- Many alternatives, eg HAML
Generation of Site

- Source files in myproj/source
  
  $ ls source
  
  index.html.erb  syll.html.erb
  
  meet.html.erb

- Compile

  $ bundle exec middleman build

- Result after building

  $ ls build
  
  index.html  meet.html  syll.html
Partials

☐ A document *fragment* included in other documents

☐ Include in template with `partial` function

```
<% partial "navigation" %>
...
<% partial "footer" %>
</body>
```

☐ Partial's `filename` begins with `'_`

- `ie_navigation.erb`

```
<%=
  div
  ul id="site-nav"
    li ... </li>
</ul>
</div>
```

- Note: `'_'` omitted in argument to function
Generation of Site with Partials

- Source files in myproj/source
  
  $ ls source
  _footer.erb    meet.html.erb
  _navigation.erb syll.html.erb
  index.html.erb

- Compile
  
  $ bundle exec middleman build

- Result after building
  
  $ ls build
  index.html meet.html syll.html
Site Generation With Partials

_A

index.html.erb

_B

meet.html.erb

_C

syll.html.erb

_index.html

_meet.html

_syll.html
Tricks with Partials

- Content of partial can be customized with arguments in call
- In call: pass a hash called :locals
  ```ruby
  <%= partial "banner",
        :locals => { :name => "Syllabus",
                     :amount => 34 } %>
  ```
- In partial: access hash with variables
  ```html
  <h3> <%= name %> </h3>
  <p> Costs <%= "$#{amount}.00" %> </p>
  ```
Problem

- How to guarantee every page includes partial(s)
  - Partials don't ensure one page *structure* across the site
- Every page should look like:
  ```html
  <!DOCTYPE html>
  <html>
    <head>
      <meta charset="utf-8">
      <title>Meetings</title>
      <link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" href="osu_style.css">
    </head>
    <body>
      <%= partial "navigation" %>
      ...
      <!-- different for each page -->
      <%= partial "footer" %>
    </body>
  </html>
  ```
Solution: Layout

- HTML formed from: **Layout + Template**
  - Layout is the common structure of HTML pages
  - Layout uses `yield` to include (page-specific) template
- File: `layout.erb`

```html
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <meta charset="utf-8">
    <title> ... etc
  </head>
  <body>
    <%= partial "navigation" %>
    <%= yield %>
    <%= partial "footer" %>
  </body>
</html>
```

- Layout is where you put site-wide styling
  - *e.g.*, navigation bar, div's with CSS classes, footers
Site Generation With Layouts

- `layout.erb`
- `_navigation.erb`
- `_footer.erb`
- `index.html.erb`
- `meet.html.erb`
- `syll.html.erb`
Generation of Site with Layouts

- Default layout in source/layouts/layouts.erb
  
  $ ls -F source
  
  index.html.erb  meet.html.erb
  
  layouts/
  
  $ ls source/layouts
  
  _footer.erb  _navigation.erb  layout.erb

- Result after building
  
  $ ls build
  
  index.html  meet.html  syll.html
Page-Specific Data in Layout

- Some layout content is page-specific
  - Example: `<title>` in document's head
- Solution: Ruby variable `current_page`
  - Example: `current_page.path`
- Template contains "frontmatter" that sets the value of `current_page.data`
  - In template (contact.html.erb)
    ```ruby
    ---
    title: "Contact Information"
    ---
    ```
  - In layout (layout.erb)
    ```erb
    <title> <%= current_page.data.title %>
    </title>
    ```
Example: Navbar Highlights
Why Bother?

1. Code reuse and single-point-of-control over change
2. Authoring of content in a language that is more human-friendly
3. Parameterized generation of markup and content

Let's look at each of these benefits in turn...
Motivation #2: Improved Syntax

- HTML tags make content hard to read
  - `<p>`, `<h2>`, `<em>`, `<a href='...'>` etc
  - vs plain text, which is easier to read

- Common plain text conventions:
  - Blank lines between paragraphs
  - Underline titles with −'s or ='s
  - Emphasize *words*, _words_, **words**
  - Links as [text](url)
  - Unordered lists with bullets using * or -
  - Numbered lists with 1., 2., 3.
Why Middleman?

The last few years have seen an explosion in the amount and variety of tools developers can use to build web applications. Ruby on Rails selects a handful of these tools:

- Sass for DRY stylesheets
- CoffeeScript for safer and less verbose javascript
- Multiple asset management solutions, including Sprockets
- ERb & Haml for dynamic pages and simplified HTML syntax

Middleman gives the stand-alone developer access to all these tools and many, many more. Why would you use a
Why Middleman?

The last few years have seen an explosion in the amount and variety of tools developers can use to build web applications. Ruby on Rails selects a handful of these tools:

- Sass for DRY stylesheets
- CoffeeScript for safer and less verbose javascript
- Multiple asset management solutions, including Sprockets
- ERb & Haml for dynamic pages and simplified HTML syntax

Middleman gives the stand-alone developer...
## Why Middleman?

The last few years have seen an explosion in the amount and variety of tools developers can use to build web applications. Ruby on Rails selects a handful of these tools:

* [Sass](http://sass-lang.com/) for DRY stylesheets
* [CoffeeScript](http://coffeescript.org/) for safer and less verbose javascript
* Multiple asset management solutions, including [Sprockets](https://github.com/sstephenson/sprockets)
* [ERb](http://ruby-doc.org/stdlib-2.0.0/libdoc/erb/rdoc/ERB.html) & [Haml](http://haml.info/) for dynamic pages and simplified HTML syntax

**Middleman** gives the stand-alone developer...
Markdown

- Formalizes these ASCII conventions
  - Filename extension: `.md`
  - Adds some less familiar ones (e.g. `\`)
- Translator generates HTML from markdown
  - Examples: GitHub readme's, user-posted comments on web boards (StackOverflow)
  - Other target languages possible too
- See Middleman's README.md
  - Regular view
  - Raw view
- Warning: many Markdown dialects
  - daringfireball.net (original, 2004, stale)
  - GitHub-flavored markdown (GFM), Markdown Extra
  - kramdown, rdiscount, redcarpet, ...
CSS: Magic Numbers

- Literals are common in CSS
  
  ```css
  h1 { background-color: #ff14a6; }
  h2 { color: #ff14a6; }
  ```

- Result: Lack of single-point-of-control

- Solution: SASS allows variables

  ```css
  $primary: #ff14a6;
  h1 { background-color: $primary; }
  h2 { color: $primary; }
  ```

- Translator generates CSS from SASS
CSS: Repeated Ancestors

- CSS requires separate rules for different elements with same ancestor
  ```css
  .navbar ul { ... }
  .navbar li { ... }
  ```

- Changing classname requires changing all these rules

- Solution: SASS allows nested selectors
  ```css
  .navbar {
      ul { ... }
      li { ... }
  }
  ```
Why Bother?

1. Code reuse and single-point-of-control over change
2. Authoring of content in a language that is more human-friendly
3. Parameterized generation of markup and content

Let's look at each of these benefits in turn...
Motiv'n #3: Content Generation

- Problem: Parameterized/repeated content
  - Example: Course offering term
- Solution: Read content from data
  - Files in subdirectory data/ define variables
    - `# data/dates.yml`
      - `term: "Spring 2017"`
    - Variables then available in templates
      - `<%= data.dates.term %>`

- Problem: Repeated structure
  - Example: Each row in table
- Solution: Generate structure with code
  - Iterate over array, creating table rows
  - See course web site
    - `<% meetings.each do |meet| %>
      - `<tr> <td> <%= meet.date %> </td>...`
Generating Random Content

- Want placeholder content for prototype
  - Useful for making style/layout decisions
  - Don't care about actual content
- Solution: use a *method* that returns an HTML string
  ```ruby
  <%= lorem.sentence %>
  ```
- Many lorem methods available
  - `lorem.paragraphs` 2
  - `lorem.date`
  - `lorem.last_name`
  - `lorem.image('300x400')`
    ```ruby
    #=> http://placehold.it/300x400
    ```
Helper Functions

- Used to generate common HTML snippets
- Example: hyperlinks
  
  `<a href="/about.html">About us</a>`

- With `link_to` helper in template:
  
  `<%= link_to('About us', '/about.html') %>`
  
  #=> `<a href="/about.html">About us</a>`

- Many optional arguments
  
  `<%= link_to('My Blog', '/blog.html', :class => 'happy') %>`
  
  #=> `<a href="/blog.html' class='happy'>My Blog</a>`
(Many) More Helper Functions

- Format helpers
  pluralize 2, 'person' #=> '2 people'

- Tag helpers
  tag :img, src: '/kittens/png'
  content_tag :p, class: 'warning' do ... end

- Form helpers
  form_tag '/login', method: 'post'
  button_tag 'cancel', class: 'clear'

- Asset helpers
  stylesheet_link_tag 'all'
  javascript_include_tag 'jquery'
  favicon_tag 'images/favicon.png'
  image_tag 'padrino.png',
    width: '35', class: 'logo'
Summary

- ERb
  - Template for generating HTML
  - Scriplets and expressions
- Reuse of views with partials
  - Included with partial (eg `<%= partial...`)
  - Filename is prepended with underscore
  - Parameter passing from parent template
- Layouts and templates
- Markdown, SASS
- Content generation and helpers