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Performance Rails

Writing Rails applications with sustainable performance Ruby en Rails 2006

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The most boring talk, ever!

No DHTML visual effects!

No fancy AJAX programming!

No Java bashing!

No funny stories!

I won't even mention George!





What you will get



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Lots of numbers!

Shameless promotion of my railsbench package!

Programming/engineering advice you might not want to hear

And I will even tell you to use Windows for Rails performance work!

How I got started on Rails

Cooking is one of my hobbies.

- wrote Perl screen scraper to collect recipes
- produced lots of static HTML and a PDF book
- $\#recipes > 1.000 \implies$ unmanagable!

Needed: search, comments, favorites, menues, sharing with friends, access control \implies *a web application*

But: no interest (and justification) in writing another boring old web app using boring (PHP) or complicated (Java) web technology, so ... project put to rest.

Enter: *Hackers and Painters*, /., Rails movies, Ruby.

refreshing, interesting \Rightarrow Fun! learn something new (Ruby) \Rightarrow Justification!



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Knuzzlipuzzli Demo

Focus of this Talk

Rails performance benchmarking and tuning

- session container performance
- caching
- writing efficient Ruby/Rails code
- benchmarking
- tuning Ruby's garbage collector





Scaling Rails Apps

DHH says:

"Scaling Rails has been solved"

Don't get fooled by this statement.

David likes to make provoking statements ;-)

It only means, "it can be done" because of Rails'

Shared Nothing Architecture

In practice, scaling is a very complicated issue.

Rails is only a small part of the scaling problem.

I suggest to read Jason Hoffman's slides on scaling Rails:

http://www.scalewithrails.com/downloads/ScaleWithRails-April2006.pdf

Or attend the workshop in Frankfurt (25.10/26.10)



A Scaling Strategy

- 1. Start simple!
- 2. 1 box, running everything, 1 FCGI listener.
- 3. Measure.
- 4. Adjust configuration, adding caching components, more listeners, more machines, etc.
- 5. Goto Step 3

This is a never ending, tedious process. If you want to become the next Google ;-)



Rails Mailing List Quotes w.r.t. Performance Questions

- Don't worry, it's fast enough for us, so it will be fast enough for you.
- Look at our successful applications in production, with thousands of users.
- Premature optimization is evil.
- Just throw hardware at it.

These are not my answers!

- If your app can only handle 5 requests per second, you've done something wrong, which can't be rectified by JTHAI.
- And you probably want to know how to improve it.



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On Performance Tuning

- Trying to improve performance without measuring is foolish.
- Trying to improve performance 1 week before you go live won't work.
- If your app's design has an inherent performance problem, you will need a costly redesign.
- Planning ahead for an established performance goal will help you.

(if you have only ten visitors per hour, performance is probably not a problem for you)

- There's no need to optimize every page of your web app.
- Focus on your app's hot spots (frequently visited pages), and measure continuously during development.
- railsbench can help you with performance measuring and regression testing.

Performance Parameters

Latency

How fast can you answer a request?

Throughput

How many requests can you process per second?

Utilization

Are your servers/components idle most of the time?

Cost Efficiency

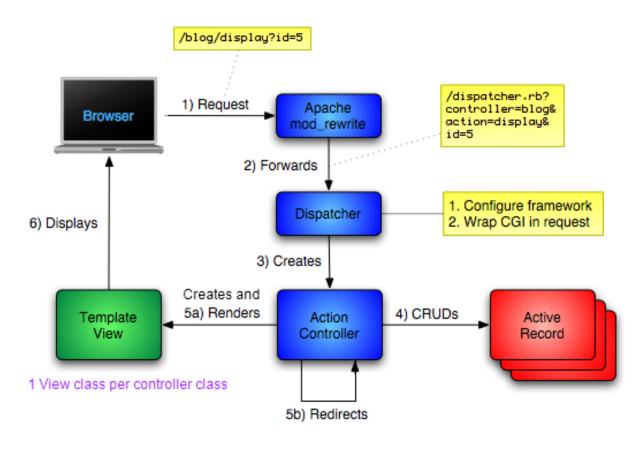
Performance per unit cost

Compute mean, min, max, standard deviation (if applicable) Standard deviation will tell you how reliable your data is.



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Rails Request Cycle





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Top Rails Performance Problems

Depends on who you ask, but these are my favorites:

- slow helper methods
- complicated routes
- using associations when you don't have to
- retrieving too much from DB
- slow session storage

DB performance is usually not a bottleneck!

Processing ActiveRecord objects after retrieval is the more expensive part.



Available Session Containers

In Memory

Fastest, but you will lose all sessions on app server crash/restart. Restricted to 1 app server process. *Doesn't scale*.

File System

Easy setup. One file (below /tmp) for each session. Scales by using NFS or NAS (beware 10K active sessions!). *Slower than*

Database/ActiveRecordStore

Easy setup (comes with Rails distribution). Much slower than

Database/SQLSessionStore

Uses ARStore session table format. But does all processing using raw SQL queries. Needs tweaking if you want additional fields on session entries. *setup*

memcached

Slightly faster than SQLSessionStore. Presumably scales best. Very tunable. Automatic session cleaning. Harder to obtain statistics. *setup*

DrbStore

Can be used on platforms where memcached is not available. Slower than memcached. No automatic expiry (but could be added quickly).



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ActiveRecordStore vs. SQLSessionStore

page	cl real	c2 real	cl r/s	c2 r/s	cl ms/r	c2 ms/r	c1/c2
1:	2.80733	1.14600	356.2	872.6	2.81	1.15	2.45
2:	3.91667	1.33867	255.3	747.0	3.92	1.34	2.93
3:	5.21367	1.94300	191.8	514.7	5.21	1.94	2.68
4:	5.65633	2.41167	176.8	414.7	5.66	2.41	2.35
5:	11.64600	7.39600	85.9	135.2	11.65	7.40	1.57
6:	16.83333	15.10933	59.4	66.2	16.83	15.11	1.11
7:	17.09333	15.52067	58.5	64.4	17.09	15.52	1.10
8:	8.19267	6.78133	122.1	147.5	8.19	6.78	1.21
GC:	c1 real 3.83667	c2 real 2.76133	c1 #gc 25.0	c2 #gc 20.0	c1 gc% 5.38	c2 gc% 5.35	

Additional details regarding SQLSessionStore and memcached can be found here: http://railsexpress.de/blog/articles/2005/12/19/roll-your-own-sql-session-store http://railsexpress.de/blog/articles/2006/01/24/using-memcached-for-ruby-on-railssession-storage

railsbench



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Demo

- Downloadable from http://rubyforge.org/projects/railsbench
- I recommend the README file. Web doc is somewhat out of date.

Cachable Elements

Pages

Fastest. Complete pages are stored on file system. Web server bypasses app server for rendering. Scales through NFS or NAS. Problematic if your app requires login.

Actions

Second fastest option. Caches the result of invoking actions on controllers. User login id can be used as part of the storage key.

Fragments

Very useful for caching small fragments (hence the name) of HTML produced during request processing. Can be made user aware.

Action caching is just a special case of fragment caching.

Several storage containers are available for fragment caching.



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Storage Options for Fragment Caching

In Memory

Blazing speed! If your app is running fast enough with 1 FCGI process, go for it!

File System

Reasonably fast. Expiring fragments using regular expressions for keys is slow.

DrbStore

Comparable to FileStore. Expiring fragments is faster.

memcached

Faster and more scalable than DrbStore. Doesn't support expiring by regular expression.

The size of the actual code in Rails to handle caching is small.

It would be easy to extend so that all of the above options can be used concurrently.



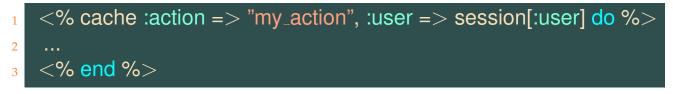
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Use Strings as Fragment Cache Keys

Route generation can be excruciatingly slow.

Avoid using URL hashes as cache keys.



This is *much* faster:

1 <% cache "#{@controller}/my_action/#{session[:user]}" do %>
2 ...
3 <% end %>

Also gives you more control over efficient expiry using regular expressions.





ActionController Issues

Components

I suggest to avoid components. I haven't found any good use for them, yet. Each embedded component will be handled using a fresh request cycle.

Can always be replaced by helper methods and partials.

Filters

Don't use too many of them.

If you can combine several related filters into one, do it.

If you are using components, make sure you don't rerun your filters n times. Better pass along context information explicitly.

You can use the skip_filter method for this. It will be evaluated at class load time, so no runtime overhead during request processing.



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ActionView Issues

Instance variables

For each request, one controller instance and one view instance will be instantiated.

Instance variables created during controller processing will be transfered to the view instance (using instance_variable_get and instance_variable_set)

So: avoid creating instance variables in controller actions, which will not be used in the view (not always possible, see filters).



Internal Render API

At one point in time DHH decided he liked hashes and symbols soo much, that he redesigned the render API.

render_text "Hello world!"
 render_action "special"

became

render :text => "Hello world!"
render :action => "special"

In the process, rendering performance was impacted (esp. for partials).

Thanks to my intervention, the old methods are still available.

You can still use them.





Slow Helper Methods

Consider:

pluralize (n, 'post')

This will create a new Inflector instance, and try to derive the correct plural for 'post'. This is expensive. Just do

pluralize (n, 'post', 'posts')

Consider:

<%= end_form_tag %>

VS.

</form>

How's the first one better?



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textilize

Really, really, slow.

If you're textilizing database fields, consider caching them, some place.

- I've analyzed an application, where 30% CPU was spent on textilizing. Another 30% were spent on GC. And about 10% on URL recognition.
- Caching the formatted fields in the DB eliminated the textilize overhead completely.

Same trick can be applied to all kinds of formatting jobs!

link_to and url_for

Lo and behold: the highly touted superstars of Rails template helpers are the bad guys (w.r.t. performance)



```
<%= link_to "look here for something interesting",
{ :controller => "recipe", :action => edit, :id => @recipe.id },
{ :class => " edit_link " } %>
```

- both hash arguments undergo heavy massage in the Rails bowel: symbolizing, html escaping, sorting, validation
- the routing module determines the shortest possible route to the controller, action and id ⇒ every single route specified in config/routes.rb must be examined.

A much more efficient way to write this is:

```
<a href="/recipe/edit/<%=#{recipe.id}%>" class="edit_link">
look here for something interesting
</a>
```

How much more efficient?



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The Difference link_to makes

page	cl real	c2 real	cl r/s	c2 r/s	cl ms/r	c2 ms/r	c1/c2
1:	1.38033	1.36467	724.5	732.8	1.38	1.36	1.01
2:	2.21867	2.32833	450.7	429.5	2.22	2.33	0.95
3:	2.90067	2.92733	344.7	341.6	2.90	2.93	0.99
4:	2.87467	2.77600	347.9	360.2	2.87	2.78	1.04
5:	11.10467	7.63033	90.1	131.1	11.10	7.63	1.46
6:	12.47900	6.38567	80.1	156.6	12.48	6.39	1.95
7:	12.31767	6.46900	81.2	154.6	12.32	6.47	1.90
8:	11.72433	6.27067	85.3	159.5	11.72	6.27	1.87
GC:	cl real 6.48867	c2 real 3.16600	c1 #gc 43.0	c2 #gc 23.0	c1 gc% 11.38	c2 gc% 8.76	c1/c2 1.87

Notes:

- the relation c1/c2 depends on the hardware used. This seems to indicate that the quality of the Ruby implementation / OS memory management has a significant influence on relative performance.
- you probably shouldn't code every link_to as above. just use this method on pages with a large number of links.





Ruby Performance Validator



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Demo

- will tell you where the time is spent in your app
- railsbench package supports running defined benchmarks in RPVL
- need to buy a licence if you want to use it (30 day trial version available)
- more info: Software Verifaction Ltd.

Image: Close

ActiveRecord Issues

Accessing fields via association proxies is slow.

• use piggy backing for has_one relations.

Field values are retrieved from the DB as strings.

Type conversion happens on each access.

• cache converted values, if you use them several times during one request.

Sometimes you need only partial objects:

• use the :select parameter of find to retrieve ony fields used for display.



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Ruby's interpreter is sloooow!



Ruby's Interpreter

Deeply rooted in 60's technology:

- no byte code, no JIT, interprets ASTs directly
- doesn't perform any code optimization at compile time
- GC performance is erratic (more on that later)

But it doesn't matter that much, because

Rails *scales easily* (in principle, and because David said so ;-)),

The interesting questions are:

- how well can you make it scale?
- how hard is it?
- how much hardware do you need?



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Complexity of Ruby Language Elements

Local Variable access: O(1)

index into array, computed at parse time

Instance Variable Access: expected O(1)hash access by literal

Method Call: expected O(1)

- hash access to determine literal value ("f" \Rightarrow :f)
- method search along inheritance chain
- hash accesses to get the method
- there's also a method cache (which helps a bit)
- construction of argument array on heap (unless attr_reader)

Recommendation:

- don't add method abstractions needlessly
- use attr_accessors as external interfaces only
- use local variables to short circuit repeated hash accesses



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Warning: Don't run through your code and apply the optimizations to follow everywhere.

Remember: this is all about hot spots!





Micro Optimization

Avoid testing for nil using .nil?

- logger.info "Prepare to take off" unless logger.nil? vs.
 - logger.info "Prepare to take off" if logger
 - Faster, smaller code, smaller AST, fewer method calls, less GC.
 - Can't be applied if logger can take on value false (see here)

Don't use return unless you need to abort the current method or block



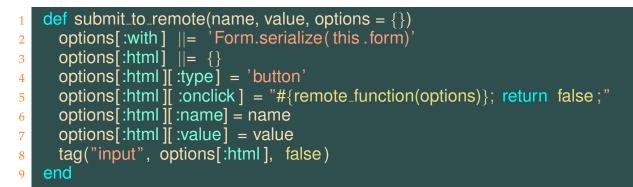
Note: methods and blocks implicitely return the value of the last evaluated expr.



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Avoiding Repeated Hash Access



This code is both simpler and faster:

```
def submit_to_remote(name, value, options = {})
     options[:with] ||= 'Form.serialize(this.form)'
2
     html = (options[:html] || = {})
3
     html[:type] = 'button'
4
     html[:onclick] = "#{remote_function(options)}; return false;"
5
     html[:name] = name
6
     html[:value] = value
7
     tag("input", html, false)
8
   end
9
```



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Caching Data in Instance Variables

If you need the same data structure repeatedly during request processing, consider caching on controller (or view) instance level.

Turn

def capital_letters
 ("A" .. "Z").to_a
 end

into

- def capital_letters
 2 @capital_letters ||= ("A" .. "Z").to_a
- 3 end



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Caching Data in Class Variables

If your data has a reasonable size to keep around permanently (i.e. doesn't slow down GC a lot) and is used on a hot application path, consider caching on class level.

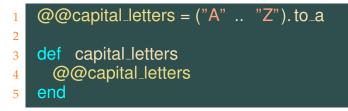
Turn

def capital_letters ("A" .. "Z").to_a end

into

2

3



Note: the cached value could be a query from the database Example: guest user.



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Coding Variable Caching Efficiently

Bad:

2 3

5 6 7

def actions unless @actions
do something complicated and costly to determine action's value
@actions = expr
end
@actions end

Better:

1	def actions
2	@actions =
3	begin
4	# do something complicated and costly to determine action's value
5	expr
6	end
7	end



Defining Constants vs. Inlining

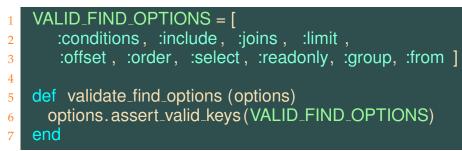
Less than optimal:

def validate_find_options (options)
 options.assert_valid_keys(:conditions, :include, :joins, :limit, :offset,
 :order, :select, :readonly, :group, :from
 end

Better:

2

3



Faster and much easier to customize.



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Using Local Variables Effectively

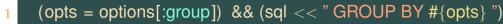
Consider:



vs.



or



Alas,

sql << " GROUP BY #{opts} " if opts = options[:group]

won't work, because matz refused to implement it (at least last time I asked for it).

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Beware Variable Capture When Defining Methods

Defining a new method passing a block, captures the defining environment.

This can cause memory leaks.

```
def define_attr_method(name, value=nil, &block)
1
      sing = class << self; self; end
2
     sing.send :alias_method, " original_ #{name}", name
3
      if block_given?
       sing.send :define_method, name, &block
5
     else
6
       # use eval instead of a block to work around a memory leak in dev
       # mode in fcgi
8
       sing.class_eval "def #{name}; #{value.to_s.inspect}; end"
9
     end
   end
11
```

It's usually preferable to use eval instead of define_method



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Don't be Stupid w.r.t. Logging

Don't forget to set the production log level to something other than DEBUG.

Don't log to log level INFO what should be logged to DEBUG.

This is a bad idiom:

logger.debug "args: #{hash.keys.sort.join(' ')}" if logger

hash.keys.sort.join(' ') will be evaluated and the arg string will be constructed, even if logger.level == ERROR.

Instead do this:

logger.debug "args: #{hash.keys.sort.join(' ')}" if logger && logger.debug?



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Ruby's GC collects and is garbage!



Ruby's Memory Management

- designed for batch scripts, not long running server apps
- tries to minimize memory usage
- simple mark and sweep algorithm
- uses malloc to manage contiguous blocks of Ruby objects (Ruby heap)
- complex data structures:
 - only references to C structs are stored on Ruby heap
 - comprises strings, arrays, hashes, local variable maps, scopes, etc.
- eases writing C extensions

Current C interface makes it hard to implement generational GC \implies unlikely to get generational GC in the near future Maybe Ruby2 will have it (but Ruby2 is a bit like Perl6)



Why Ruby GC is suboptimal for Rails

ASTs are stored on the Ruby heap and will be processed on each collection

usually the biggest part of non garbage for Rails apps Sweep phase depends on size of heap, not size of non garbage can't increase the heap size above certain limits More heap gets added, if

size of freelist after collection < FREE_MIN

a constant defined in <code>gc.c</code> as 4096

200.000 heap slots are a good lower bound for live data

for typical Rails heaps, 4096 is way too small!

Note: improving GC performance increases *throughput*, not *latency*! (unless you have a collection on each request)



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Improving GC Performance

As a first attempt, I caused the addition of the possibility to control GC from the Rails dispatcher:

excerpt from dispatch.fcgi
 RailsFCGIHandler.process! nil, 50

Will disable Ruby GC and call GC.start after 50 requests have been processed

However, small requests and large requests are treated equally

- heap could grow too large
- performance for small pages suffers
- Ruby will still deallocate heap blocks if empty after GC

Recommendation:

Patch Ruby's garbage collector!



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Patching Ruby's Garbage Collector

Download latest railsbench package. Patch Ruby using file rubygc.patch, recompile and reinstall binaries and docs.

You can then influence GC behavior by setting environment variables:

RUBY_HEAP_MIN_SLOTS

initial heap size in number of slots used (default 10000)

RUBY_HEAP_FREE_MIN

number of free heap slots that should be available after GC (default 4096)

RUBY_GC_MALLOC_LIMIT

amount of C data structures (in bytes) which can be allocated without triggering GC (default 8000000)

Recommended values to start with:

RUBY_HEAP_MIN_SLOTS = 600000 RUBY_GC_MALLOC_LIMIT = 6000000 RUBY_HEAP_FREE_MIN = 100000

Running the previous benchmark again, gives much nicer GC stats





Measuring GC Performance Using railsbench

```
perf_run_gc n "-bm=benchmark ..." [data_file]
```

runs named benchmark, producing a raw data file

```
perf_times_gc data_file
```

prints a summary for data in raw data file



Which Database Package?

Rails uses an Application Database.

Contrast this with an Integration Database.

Choice of DB vendor is largely a metter of taste. Or external restrictions imposed on your project :-(

But: Mysql and Postgresql have best support in the Rails community. Core team uses both.





Database Performance

Mysql outperforms Postgres (even without query caching)

page	cl real	c2 real	cl r/s	c2 r/s	cl ms/r	c2 ms/r	c1/c2
1:	2.51567	1.14067	397.5	876.7	2.52	1.14	2.21
2:	3.33300	1.35933	300.0	735.7	3.33	1.36	2.45
3:	2.78600	1.88567	358.9	530.3	2.79	1.89	1.48
4:	4.27167	2.67200	234.1	374.3	4.27	2.67	1.60
5:	11.91667	7.45300	83.9	134.2	11.92	7.45	1.60
6:	23.40567	15.07300	42.7	66.3	23.41	15.07	1.55
7:	22.91667	15.54667	43.6	64.3	22.92	15.55	1.47
8:	10.68733	6.79167	93.6	147.2	10.69	6.79	1.57
GC:	c1 real 2.44833	c2 real 2.60367	c1 #gc 14.0	c2 #gc 18.0	c1 gc% 2.99	c2 gc% 5.01	c1/c2 0.78

Don't use Postgres for session storage!

Use memcached or a separate Mysql session DB using MyISAM tables:

No need for transaction support on session data!





Mysql Query Caching

Greatly speeds up performance of complex queries, if

- there's no index to use
- query involves complex joins

Mysql 5.0 implements views using query caching, so you'll get it anyway.

Query caching will slow down session retrieval slightly.

But the majority of web apps read more than write (to the DB).

For apps of this type, I recommend turning it on.



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End

Thanks very much for your attention.

If you appreciated this session, you might consider buying my book, available around November 2006 from Addison Wesley, as part of the soon to be announced "Professional Ruby" series.

If you're doing commercial Rails apps, I'm also available for consulting.

Questions?



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Shared Nothing Architecture

App servers rely on a (centralized) external resource to store application state.

The state is retrieved from and stored back to the external resource per request.

J2EE parlance: Stateless Session Bean





Configuring Rails to use SQLSessionStore with Mysql/Postgres

Download latest version from my web site

Put Ruby source under lib directory.

Adjust environment.rb:

require 'sql_session_store'
ActionController::CgiRequest::DEFAULT_SESSION_OPTIONS.update(
 :database_manager => SQLSessionStore)

require 'mysql_session'

SQLSessionStore.session_class = MysqlSession

For Postgres, use

- require 'postgresql_session'
- 2 SQLSessionStore.session_class = PostgresqlSession

Note: requires Postgres 8.1!



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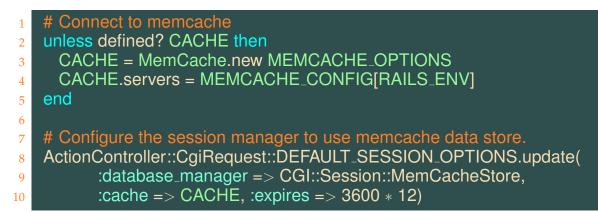
memcached Session Storage Setup

Download memcache-client: http://rubyforge.org/frs/?group_id=1266

```
require 'memcache'
   require 'memcache_util'
2
3
   # memcache defaults, environments may override these settings
4
   unless defined? MEMCACHE_OPTIONS then
5
     MEMCACHE_OPTIONS = {
        :debug => false,
        :namespace => 'my_name_space',
8
        :readonly => false
9
10
   end
11
12
   # memcache configuration
13
   unless defined? MEMCACHE_CONFIG then
14
     File.open "#{RAILS_ROOT}/config/memcache.yml" do |memcache|
15
        MEMCACHE_CONFIG = YAML ::load memcache
16
      end
17
   end
18
```



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YAML file:



Don't forget to start the server: memcached&

Session Container Overview



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Compile Time Optimizations

These are usually taken for granted in modern interpreters:

- method inlining
- strength reduction
- constant propagation
- common subexpression elimination
- loop invariant detection
- loop unrolling

 \Longrightarrow

You don't have any of these in current Ruby interpreter.

Performance aware programming can increase performance significantly!



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Booleans and Conditionals

1	nil	V	\rightsquigarrow	V		
2	false	V	\rightsquigarrow	V		
3	other	V	\rightsquigarrow	other		
4						
5	nil 8	.& v	\rightsquigarrow	false		
6	false 8	.& v	\rightsquigarrow	false		
7	other 8	.& v	\rightsquigarrow	V		
8						
9	nil . nil ?		\rightsquigarrow 1	true		
.0	<i>other</i> . ni	?	\rightsquigarrow	false		
1						
2	if nil	ther	$\mathbf{n} e_1$	else e ₂	\rightsquigarrow	<i>e</i> ₂
3	if false	ther	re_1	else e ₂	$\sim \rightarrow$	<i>e</i> ₂
.4	if other	ther	e_1	else e ₂	\rightsquigarrow	e_1



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GC Statistics (unpatched GC)

GC data file: c:/home/skaes/perfdata/xp/perf_runworld.gc.txt

collections	5	:	66		
garbage tot	cal	:	1532476		
gc time tot	cal (sec) :	1.8	6	
garbage per	req	uest :	2554.1	3	
requests pe	er co	llection:	9.0	9	
					m - 17
		mean	stddev%	min	max
gc time(ms)	:	28.08	22.0	15.00	32.00
gc time(ms) heap slots					-
2		28.08	22.0	15.00	32.00
heap slots	:	28.08 223696.00	22.0 0.0	15.00 223696.00	32.00 223696.00

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GC Statistics (patched GC)

GC data file: c:/home/skaes/perfdata/xp/perf_runworld.gc.txt

collections	:	5		
garbage total	:	1639636		
gc time total	(sec) :	0.64		
garbage per re	equest :	2732.73		
requests per o	collection:	120.00		
	mean	stddev%	min	max
gc time(ms):	mean 148.75	stddev% 6.0	min 141.00	max 157.00
gc time(ms): heap slots :				-
5	148.75	6.0	141.00	157.00
heap slots :	148.75 600000.00	6.0 0.0	141.00	157.00 600000.00



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