

Observing Resources in CoAP
draft-ietf-core-observe-09

Abstract

CoAP is a RESTful application protocol for constrained nodes and networks. The state of a resource on a CoAP server can change over time. This document specifies a simple protocol extension for CoAP that enables CoAP clients to "observe" resources, i.e., to retrieve a representation of a resource and keep this representation updated by the server over a period of time. The protocol follows a best-effort approach for sending new representations to clients, and provides eventual consistency between the state observed by each client and the actual resource state at the server.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

CoAP [[I-D.ietf-core-coap](#)] is an application protocol for constrained nodes and networks. It is intended to provide RESTful services [[REST](#)] not unlike HTTP [[RFC2616](#)] while reducing the complexity of implementation as well as the size of packets exchanged in order to make these services useful in a highly constrained network of themselves highly constrained nodes.

The model of REST is that of a client exchanging representations of resources with a server. A representation captures the current or intended state of a resource. The server is the definitive source for representations of the resources in its namespace. A client interested in the state of a resource initiates a request to the server; the server then returns a response with a representation of the resource that is current at the time of the request.

This model does not work well when a client is interested in having a current representation of a resource over a period of time. Existing approaches from HTTP, such as repeated polling or HTTP long polling [[RFC6202](#)], generate significant complexity and/or overhead and thus are less applicable in a constrained environment.

The protocol specified in this document extends the CoAP core protocol with a mechanism for a CoAP client to "observe" a resource on a CoAP server: the client can retrieve a representation of the resource and keep this representation updated by the server over a period of time.

The protocol keeps the architectural properties of REST. It enables high scalability and efficiency through the support of caches and proxies. There is no intention for it, though, to solve the full set of problems that the existing HTTP solutions solve, or to replace publish/subscribe networks that solve a much more general problem [[RFC5989](#)].

1.2. Protocol Overview

The protocol is based on the well-known observer design pattern [[GOF](#)]. In this design pattern, components called "observers" register at a specific, known provider called the "subject" that they are interested in being notified whenever the subject undergoes a change in state. The subject is responsible for administering its list of registered observers. If multiple subjects are of interest to an observer, it must register separately for all of them.

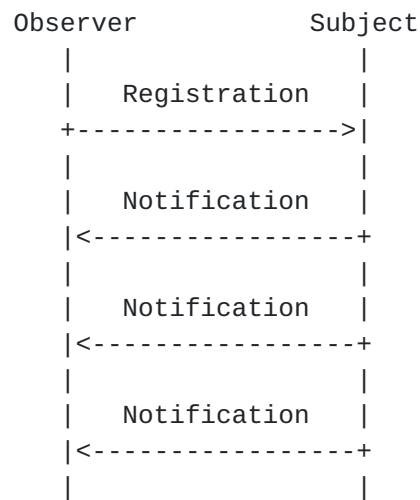


Figure 1: The Observer Design Pattern

The observer design pattern is realized in CoAP as follows:

Subject: In the context of CoAP, the subject is a resource in the namespace of a CoAP server. The state of the resource can change over time, ranging from infrequent updates to continuous state transformations.

Observer: An observer is a CoAP client that is interested in having a current representation of the resource at any given time.

Registration: A client registers its interest in a resource by initiating an extended GET request to the server. In addition to returning a representation of the target resource, this request causes the server to add the client endpoint and token specified in the request to the list of observers of that resource.

Notification: Whenever the state of a resource changes, the server notifies each client in the list of observers of the resource. Each notification is an additional CoAP response sent by the server in reply to the GET request and includes a complete, updated representation of the new resource state.

Figure 2 below shows an example of a CoAP client registering its interest in a resource and receiving three notifications: the first upon registration with the current state, and then two upon changes to the resource state. Both the registration request and the notifications are identified as such by the presence of the Observe Option defined in this document. In notifications, the Observe Option provides a sequence number for reordering detection. All notifications carry the token specified by the client in the request, so the client can easily correlate them to the request.

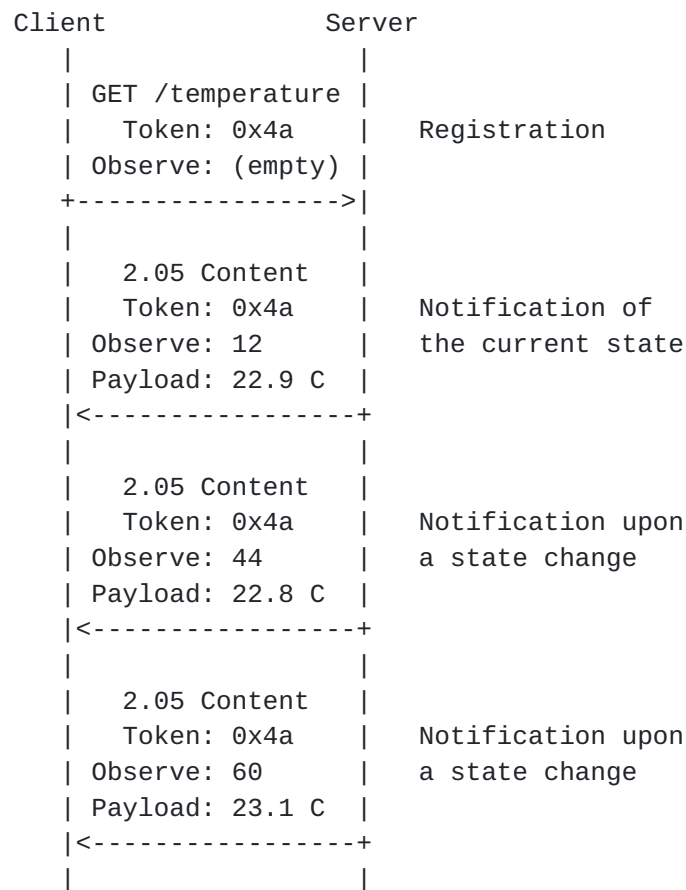


Figure 2: Observing a Resource in CoAP

The server is the authority for determining under what conditions resources change their state and how often observers are notified. The protocol does not offer explicit means for setting up triggers, thresholds or other conditions; it is up to the server to expose observable resources that change their state in a way that is useful in the application context. Resources can be parameterized to achieve similar effects, though; see [Appendix B](#) for examples.

A client's entry remains on the list of observers as long as the server can determine the client's continued interest in the resource. The interest is determined from the client's acknowledgement of notifications sent in confirmable messages by the server: If the client actively rejects a notification or if the transmission of a notification times out after several transmission attempts, then the client is assumed to be no longer interested and its entry is removed from the list of observers.

While a client is in the list of observers of a resource, the goal of the protocol is to keep the resource state observed by the client as closely in sync with the actual state at the server as possible.

Becoming out of sync at times cannot be avoided: First, there is always some latency between the change of the resource state and the receipt of the notification. Second, messages with notifications can get lost, which will cause the client assume an old state until it receives a new notification. And third, the server may erroneously come to the conclusion that the client is no longer interested in the resource, which will cause the server to stop sending notifications and the client to assume an old state until it registers its interest again.

The protocol addresses this issue as follows:

- o It follows a best-effort approach for sending the current representation to the client after a state change: Clients should see the new state after a state change as soon as possible, and they should see as many states as possible. However, a client cannot rely on observing every single state that a resource might go through.
- o It labels notifications with a maximum duration up to which it is acceptable for the observed state and the actual state to be out of sync. When the age of the notification received reaches this limit, the client cannot use the enclosed representation until it receives a new notification.
- o It is designed on the principle of eventual consistency: The protocol guarantees that, if the resource does not undergo a new change in state, eventually all registered observers will have a current representation of the latest resource state.

[1.3.](#) Requirements Notation

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [RFC 2119](#) [[RFC2119](#)].

[2.](#) The Observe Option

No.	C	U	N	R	Name	Format	Length	Default
6		x	-		Observe	empty/uint	0 B/0-3 B	(none)

C=Critical, U=Unsafe, N=No-Cache-Key, R=Repeatable

Table 1: The Observe Option

The Observe Option, when present in a request, extends the GET method so it does not only retrieve a current representation of the target resource, but also requests the server to add a new entry to the list of observers of the resource. The list entry consists of the client endpoint and the token specified by the client in the request. The value of the option in a request MUST be empty on transmission and MUST be ignored on reception.

The Observe Option is not critical for processing the request. If the server is unwilling or unable to add the client to the list of observers of the target resource, then the request falls back to a normal GET request.

In a response, the Observe Option identifies the message as a notification. This implies that the server has added the client to the list of observers and that it will notify the client of changes to the resource state. The value of the option is a 24-bit sequence number for reordering detection (see [Section 3.5](#) and [Section 4.4](#)). The sequence number is encoded in network byte order using a variable number of bytes ('uint' format; see [Section 3.2](#) of RFC XXXX [I-D.ietf-core-coap]).

The Observe Option is not part of the cache-key: a cacheable response obtained with an Observe Option in the request can be used to satisfy a request without an Observe Option, and vice versa. When a stored response with an Observe Option is used to satisfy a normal GET request, the option MUST be removed before the response is returned to the client.

3. Client-side Requirements

3.1. Request

A client can register its interest in a resource by issuing a GET request that includes an empty Observe Option. If the server returns a 2.xx response that includes an Observe Option as well, the server has added the client successfully to the list of observers of the target resource and the client will be notified of changes to the resource state.

3.2. Notifications

Notifications are additional responses sent by the server in reply to the GET request. Each notification includes the token specified by the client in the GET request, an Observe Option with a sequence number for reordering detection (see [Section 3.5](#)) and a payload in the same Content-Format as the initial response.

Notifications have a 2.05 (Content) response code, or a 2.03 (Valid) response code if the client included one or more ETag Options in the request (see [Section 3.3](#)). In the event that the resource changes in a way that would cause a normal GET request at that time to return a non-2.xx response (for example, when the resource is deleted), the server sends a notification with an appropriate response code (such as 4.04 Not Found) and removes the client from the list of observers.

[3.3](#). Caching

As notifications are just additional responses to a GET request, notifications partake in caching as defined in [Section 5.6](#) of RFC XXXX [[I-D.ietf-core-coap](#)]. Both the freshness model and the validation model are supported.

[3.3.1](#). Freshness

A client MAY store a notification like a response in its cache and use a stored notification that is fresh without contacting the server. Like a response, a notification is considered fresh while its age is not greater than the value indicated by the Max-Age Option and no newer notification/response has been received.

The server will do its best to keep the resource state observed by the client as closely in sync with the actual state as possible. However, a client cannot rely on observing every single state that a resource might go through. For example, if the network is congested or the state changes more frequently than the network can handle, the server can skip notifications for any number of intermediate states.

The server uses the Max-Age Option to indicate an age up to which it is acceptable that the observed state and the actual state are inconsistent. If the age of the latest notification becomes greater than its indicated Max-Age, then the client MUST NOT use the enclosed representation unless it is validated.

[3.3.2](#). Validation

When a client has one or more notifications stored in its cache for a resource, it can use the ETag Option in the GET request to give the server an opportunity to select a stored notification to be used.

The client MAY include an ETag Option for each stored response that is applicable in the GET request. Whenever the observed resource changes to a representation identified by one of the ETag Options, the server can select a stored response by sending a 2.03 (Valid) notification with an appropriate ETag Option instead of a 2.05 (Content) notification.

A client implementation needs to keep all candidate responses in its cache until it is no longer interested in the target resource or it issues a GET request with a new set of entity-tags.

3.4. Aggregation

Every successful GET request with an Observe Option yields a new, independent stream of notifications. Like a fresh response can be used to satisfy a request without contacting the server, the stream of notifications resulting from one request can be used to satisfy another request if the target resource is the same.

A client **MUST** aggregate GET requests with an Observe Option for the same target resource. The target resource **SHALL** be identified for this purpose by the request URI and all options in the request that are part of the cache-key (such as the Accept Option).

To make sure it has a current representation, it **MAY** issue a GET request without an Observe Option at any time. It is **RECOMMENDED** that the client does not issue a GET request (with or without Observe Option) for a resource while it still has a fresh notification/response in its cache. Additionally, the client **SHOULD** wait for a random amount of time between 5 and 15 seconds before issuing the request to avoid synchronicity with other clients.

3.5. Reordering

Messages with notifications can arrive in a different order than they were sent. Since the goal is to keep the observed state as closely in sync with the actual state as possible, a client **MUST NOT** update the observed state with a notification that arrives later than a newer notification.

For reordering detection, the server sets the value of the Observe Option in each notification to the 24 least-significant bits of a strictly increasing sequence number. An incoming notification is newer than the newest notification received so far when one of the following conditions is met:

$$\begin{aligned} & (V1 < V2 \text{ and } V2 - V1 < 2^{23}) \text{ or} \\ & (V1 > V2 \text{ and } V1 - V2 > 2^{23}) \text{ or} \\ & (T2 > T1 + 128 \text{ seconds}) \end{aligned}$$

where V1 is the value of the Observe Option of the newest notification received so far, V2 the value of the Observe Option of the incoming notification, T1 a client-local timestamp of the newest notification received so far, and T2 a client-local timestamp of the incoming notification.

Design Note: The first two conditions verify that V1 is less than V2 in 24-bit serial number arithmetic [[RFC1982](#)]. The third condition ensures that the time elapsed between the two incoming messages is not so large that the difference between V1 and V2 has become larger than the largest integer that it is meaningful to add to a 24-bit sequence number; in other words, after 128 seconds have elapsed without any notification, a client does not need to check the sequence numbers in order to assume an incoming notification is new.

The client MUST specify a token in its GET request that is currently not in use for the client/server pair, as the sequence numbers provide an order only among the notifications resulting from the same request.

3.6. Transmission

A notification can be confirmable or non-confirmable, i.e., be sent in a confirmable or a non-confirmable message. The message type used is independent from the type used for the request or for any previous notification.

If a client does not recognize the token in a confirmable notification, it MUST NOT acknowledge the message and SHOULD reject it with a Reset message; otherwise, the client MUST acknowledge the message as usual. In the case of a non-confirmable notification, rejecting the message with a Reset message is OPTIONAL.

An acknowledgement message signals to the server that the client is alive and interested in receiving further notifications; if the server does not receive an acknowledgement in reply to a confirmable notification, it will assume that the client is no longer interested and will eventually remove the associated entry from the list of observers.

3.7. Cancellation

A client that is no longer interested in receiving notifications for a resource can simply reject the next notification with a Reset message. In the case of a confirmable notification, the server will then remove the associated entry from the list of observers of this resource. In the case of a non-confirmable notification, the server may (but is not required to) remove the list entry. So the client may have to wait for a confirmable notification if the servers seems to ignore the Reset messages that the client sends to reject non-confirmable notifications.

4. Server-side Requirements

4.1. Request

A GET request that includes an Observe Option requests the server not only to return a current representation of the target resource, but also to add a new entry to the list of observers of that resource. The list entry consists of the client endpoint and the token specified by the client in the request. If a client sends multiple requests, each request creates a new entry in the list.

Upon success, the server **MUST** return a current representation of the resource and **MUST** notify the client of subsequent changes to the resource state for each entry of the client in the list of observers.

A server that is unable or unwilling to add the client to the list of observers of the target resource **MAY** silently ignore the Observe Option and process the GET request as usual. The resulting response **MUST NOT** include an Observe Option, the absence of which signals to the client that it will not be notified of changes to the resource and, e.g., needs to poll the resource for its state instead.

4.2. Notifications

A client is notified of changes to the resource state by additional responses sent by the server in reply to the GET request. Each such notification response (including the initial response) **MUST** include an Observe Option and **MUST** echo the token specified by the client in the GET request. If there are multiple entries in the list of observers, the order in which the clients are notified is not defined; the server is free to use any method to determine the order.

A notification **SHOULD** have a 2.05 (Content) or 2.03 (Valid) response code. However, in the event that the state of a resource changes in a way that would cause a normal GET request at that time to return a non-2.xx response (for example, when the resource is deleted), the server **SHOULD** notify the client by sending a notification with an appropriate response code (such as 4.04 Not Found) and **MUST** remove the client from the list of observers of the resource.

The Content-Format used in a notification **MUST** be the same as the one used in the initial response to the GET request. If the server is unable to continue sending notifications in this Content-Format, it **SHOULD** send a notification with a 4.06 (Not Acceptable) response code and **MUST** remove the client from the list of observers of the resource.

A non-2.xx notification **MUST NOT** include an Observe Option.

4.3. Caching

As notifications are just additional responses sent by the server, they are subject to caching as defined in [Section 5.6](#) of RFC XXXX [[I-D.ietf-core-coap](#)].

4.3.1. Freshness

After returning the initial response, the server MUST try to keep the returned representation current, i.e., keep the resource state observed by the client as closely in sync with the actual resource state as possible.

Since becoming out of sync at times cannot be avoided, the server MUST indicate for each representation an age up to which it is acceptable that the observed state and the actual state are inconsistent. This age is application-dependent and MUST be specified in notifications using the Max-Age Option.

When the resource does not change and the client has a current representation, the server does not need to send a notification. However, if the client does not receive a notification, it cannot tell if the observed state and the actual state are still in sync. Thus, when the age of the latest notification becomes greater than its indicated Max-Age, the client must assume that the states have become inconsistent. The server MAY wish to prevent that by sending a notification with the unchanged representation just before Max-Age expires.

4.3.2. Validation

A client can include a set of entity-tags in its request using the ETag Option. When a observed resource changes its state and the origin server is about to send a 2.05 (Content) notification, then, whenever that notification has an entity-tag in the set of entity-tags specified by the client, the server MAY send a 2.03 (Valid) response with an appropriate ETag Option instead.

4.4. Reordering

Because messages can get reordered, the client needs a way to determine if a notification arrived later than a newer notification. For this purpose, the server MUST set the value of the Observe Option of each notification it sends to the 24 least-significant bits of a strictly increasing sequence number. The sequence number MAY start at any value and MUST NOT increase so fast that it increases by more than 2^{24} within less than 256 seconds.

The sequence number selected for a notification MUST be greater than that of any preceding notification sent to the same client for the same resource with the same token. The value of the Observe Option MUST be current at the time of transmission; if a notification is retransmitted, the server MUST update value of option to the sequence number that is current at that time before sending the message.

Implementation Note: A simple implementation that satisfies the requirements is to obtain a timestamp from a local clock. The sequence number then is the timestamp in ticks, where 1 tick = $(256 \text{ seconds}) / (2^{24}) = 15.26 \text{ microseconds}$. It is not necessary that the clock reflects the current time/date or that it ticks in a precisely periodical way.

Another valid implementation is to store a 24-bit unsigned integer variable per resource and increment this variable each time the resource undergoes a change of state (provided that the resource changes its state less than 2^{24} times in the next 256 seconds after every state change). This removes the need to update the value of the Observe Option on retransmission when the resource state did not change.

Design Note: The choice of a 24-bit option value and a time span of 256 seconds allows for a notification rate of up to 65536 notifications per second. 64K ought to be enough for anybody.

4.5. Transmission

A notification can be sent in a confirmable or a non-confirmable message. The message type used is typically application-dependent and MAY be determined by the server for each notification individually. For example, for resources that change in a somewhat predictable or regular fashion, notifications can be sent in non-confirmable messages; for resources that change infrequently, notifications can be sent in confirmable messages. The server can combine these two approaches depending on the frequency of state changes and the importance of individual notifications.

A server MAY choose to skip sending a notification if it knows that it will send another notification soon, for example, when the state is changing frequently. Similarly, it MAY choose to send a notification more than once. However, above all, the server MUST ensure that a client in the list of observers of a resource eventually observes the latest state if the resource does not undergo a new change in state. For example, when state changes occur in bursts, the server can skip some notifications, send the notifications in non-confirmable messages, and make sure that the client observes the latest state change by repeating the last

notification in a confirmable message when the burst is over.

The client's acknowledgement of a confirmable notification signals to the server that the client is interested in receiving further notifications. If a client rejects a confirmable notification with a Reset message, the client is no longer interested and the server **MUST** remove the associated entry from the list of observers. If the client rejects a non-confirmable notification, the server **MAY** remove the entry from the list of observers as well. (It is expected that the server does remove the entry if it has the information available that is needed to match the Reset message to the non-confirmable notification, but the server is not required to keep this information.)

At a minimum, the server **MUST** send a notification in a confirmable message instead of a non-confirmable message at least every 24 hours, so a client that went away or is no longer interested does not remain forever in the list of observers.

The server **MUST** limit the number of confirmable notifications for which an acknowledgement has not been received yet to **NSTART** (1 by default; see [Section 4.7](#) of RFC XXXX [[I-D.ietf-core-coap](#)]); and it **SHOULD NOT** send more than one non-confirmable notification every 3 seconds on average.

When the state of an observed resource changes while the server is still waiting for a confirmable notification to be acknowledged or the 3 seconds for a non-confirmable notification to elapse, then the server **MUST** proceed as follows:

1. Wait for the current transmission attempt to complete.
2. If the result is a Reset message or the transmission was the last attempt to deliver a notification, remove the associated entry from the list of observers of the observed resource.
3. If the entry is still in the list of observers, start to transmit a new notification with a representation of the current resource state. Should the resource have changed its state more than once in the meantime, the notifications for the intermediate states are silently skipped.
4. If the transmission attempt completed in step 1 timed out, increment the retransmission counter and double the timeout for the new transmission; otherwise, reinitialize both the retransmission counter and the timeout as described in [Section 4.2](#) of RFC XXXX [[I-D.ietf-core-coap](#)].

5. Intermediaries

A client may be interested in a resource in the namespace of an origin server that is reached through a chain of one or more CoAP intermediaries. In this case, the client registers its interest with the first intermediary towards the origin server, acting as if it was communicating with the origin server itself as specified in [Section 3](#). It is the task of this intermediary to provide the client with a current representation of the target resource and send notifications upon changes to the target resource state, much like an origin server as specified in [Section 4](#).

To perform this task, the intermediary SHOULD make use of the protocol specified in this document, taking the role of the client and registering its own interest in the target resource with the next hop towards the origin server. If the next hop does not return a response with an Observe Option, the intermediary MAY resort to polling the next hop or MAY itself return a response without an Observe Option.

The communication between each pair of hops is independent; each hop in the server role MUST determine individually how many notifications to send, of which message type, and so on. Each hop MUST generate its own values for the Observe Option, and MUST set the value of the Max-Age Option according to the age of the local current representation.

If two or more clients have registered their interest in a resource with an intermediary, the intermediary MUST register itself only once with the next hop and fan out the notifications it receives to all registered clients. This relieves the next hop from sending the same notifications multiple times and thus enables scalability.

An intermediary is not required to act on behalf of a client to observe a resource; an intermediary MAY observe a resource, for example, just to keep its own cache up to date.

See [Appendix A.1](#) for examples.

6. Web Linking

A web link [[RFC5988](#)] to a resource accessible over CoAP (for example, in a link-format document [[RFC6690](#)]) MAY include the target attribute "obs".

The "obs" attribute, when present, is a hint indicating that the destination of a link is useful for observation and thus, for

example, should have a suitable graphical representation in a user interface. Note that this is only a hint; it is not a promise that the Observe Option can actually be used to perform the observation. A client may need to resort to polling the resource if the Observe Option is not returned in the response to the GET request.

A value MUST NOT be given for the "obs" attribute; any present value MUST be ignored by parsers. The "obs" attribute MUST NOT appear more than once in a given link-value; occurrences after the first MUST be ignored by parsers.

7. Security Considerations

The security considerations of RFC XXXX [[I-D.ietf-core-coap](#)] apply.

The considerations about amplification attacks are somewhat amplified when observing resources. Without client authentication, a server MUST therefore strictly limit the number of notifications that it sends between receiving acknowledgements that confirm the actual interest of the client in the data; i.e., any notifications sent in non-confirmable messages MUST be interspersed with confirmable messages. (An attacker may still spoof the acknowledgements if the confirmable messages are sufficiently predictable.)

As with any protocol that creates state, attackers may attempt to exhaust the resources that the server has available for maintaining the list of observers for each resource. Servers may want to access-control this creation of state. As degraded behavior, the server can always fall back to processing the request as a normal GET request (without an Observe Option) if it is unwilling or unable to add a client to the list of observers of a resource, including if system resources are exhausted or nearing exhaustion.

Intermediaries must be careful to ensure that notifications cannot be employed to create a loop. A simple way to break any loops is to employ caches for forwarding notifications in intermediaries.

8. IANA Considerations

The following entry is added to the CoAP Option Numbers registry:

+-----+-----+-----+
Number Name Reference
+-----+-----+-----+
6 Observe [RFCXXXX]
+-----+-----+-----+

9. Acknowledgements

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[Appendix A](#). Examples

t	Observed State	CLIENT	SERVER	Actual State
1				
2	unknown			18.5 C
3		+----->		Header: GET 0x41011633
4		GET		Token: 0x4a
5				Uri-Path: temperature
6				Observe: (empty)
7				
8				
9		<-----+		Header: 2.05 0x61451633
10		2.05		Token: 0x4a
11	18.5 C			Observe: 9
12				Max-Age: 15
13				Payload: "18.5 C"
14				
15				
16		<-----+		Header: 2.05 0x51457b50
17		2.05		Token: 0x4a
18	19.2 C			Observe: 16
19				Max-Age: 15
20				Payload: "19.2 C"
21				

Figure 3: A client registers and receives one notification of the current state and one of a new state upon a state change

t	Observed State	CLIENT	SERVER	Actual State
22				
23	19.2 C			19.2 C
24				
25		X-----+		Header: 2.05 0x51457b51
26		2.05		Token: 0x4a
27				Observe: 25
28				Max-Age: 15
29				Payload: "19.7 C"
30				
31				
32				
33	19.2 C			
34	(stale)			
35				
36				
37				
38		+----->		Header: GET 0x41011634
39		GET		Token: 0xb2
40				Uri-Path: temperature
41				Observe: (empty)
42				
43				
44		<-----+		Header: 2.05 0x61451634
45		2.05		Token: 0xb2
46	19.7 C			Observe: 44
47				Max-Age: 15
48				ETag: 0x78797a7a79
49				Payload: "19.7 C"
50				

Figure 4: The client re-registers after Max-Age ends

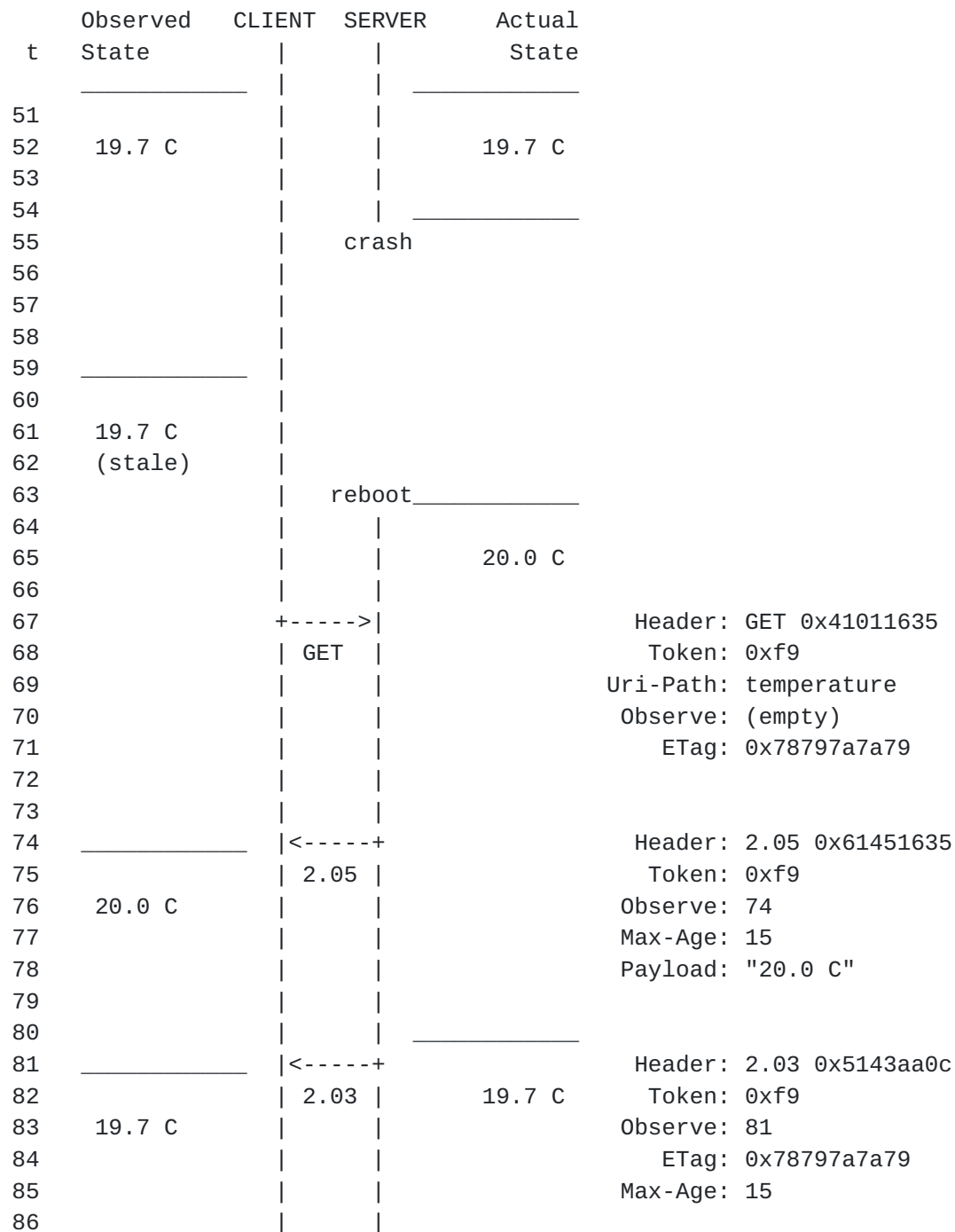


Figure 5: The client re-registers and gives the server the opportunity to select a stored response

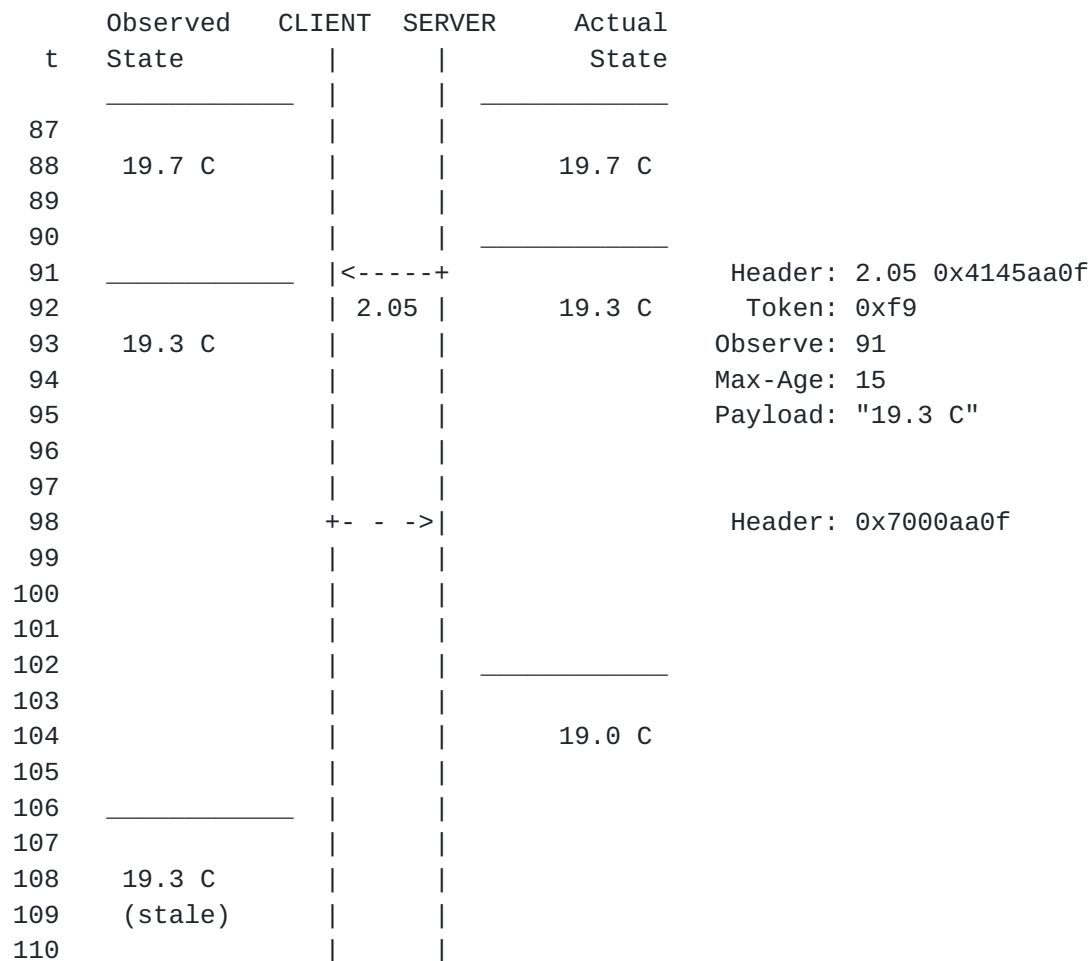


Figure 6: The client rejects a notification and thereby cancels the observation

A.1. Proxying

CLIENT	PROXY	SERVER
	+----->	Header: GET 0x41015fb8
	GET	Token: 0x1a
		Uri-Host: sensor.example
		Uri-Path: status
		Observe: (empty)
	<-----+	Header: 2.05 0x61455fb8
	2.05	Token: 0x1a
		Observe: 42
		Max-Age: 60
		Payload: "ready"
+----->		Header: GET 0x41011633
GET		Token: 0x9a
		Proxy-Uri: coap://sensor.example/status
<-----+		Header: 2.05 0x61451633
2.05		Token: 0x9a
		Max-Age: 53
		Payload: "ready"
	<-----+	Header: 2.05 0x514505fc0
	2.05	Token: 0x1a
		Observe: 135
		Max-Age: 60
		Payload: "busy"
+----->		Header: GET 0x41011634
GET		Token: 0x9b
		Proxy-Uri: coap://sensor.example/status
<-----+		Header: 2.05 0x61451634
2.05		Token: 0x9b
		Max-Age: 49
		Payload: "busy"

Figure 7: A proxy observes a resource to keep its cache up to date

CLIENT	PROXY	SERVER
+----->		Header: GET 0x41011635
GET		Token: 0x6a
		Proxy-Uri: coap://sensor.example/status
		Observe: (empty)
<- - -+		Header: 0x60001635
	+----->	Header: GET 0x4101af90
	GET	Token: 0xaa
		Uri-Host: sensor.example
		Uri-Path: status
		Observe: (empty)
	<-----+	Header: 2.05 0x6145af90
	2.05	Token: 0xaa
		Observe: 67
		Max-Age: 60
		Payload: "ready"
<-----+		Header: 2.05 0x4145af94
2.05		Token: 0x6a
		Observe: 17346
		Max-Age: 60
		Payload: "ready"
+ - - ->		Header: 0x6000af94
	<-----+	Header: 2.05 0x51455a20
	2.05	Token: 0xaa
		Observe: 157
		Max-Age: 60
		Payload: "busy"
<-----+		Header: 2.05 0x5145af9b
2.05		Token: 0x6a
		Observe: 17436
		Max-Age: 60
		Payload: "busy"

Figure 8: A client observes a resource through a proxy

[Appendix B.](#) Modeling Resources to Tailor Notifications

A server may want to provide notifications that respond to very specific conditions on some state. This is best done by modeling the resources that the server exposes according to these needs.

For example, for a CoAP server with an attached temperature sensor,

- o the server could, in the simplest form, expose a resource `<coap://server/temperature>` that changes its state every second to the current temperature measured by the sensor;
- o the server could, however, also expose a resource `<coap://server/temperature/felt>` that changes its state to "cold" when it's warm and the temperature drops below a preconfigured threshold, and to "warm" when it's cold and the temperature exceeds a second, slightly higher threshold;
- o the server could expose a parameterized resource `<coap://server/temperature/critical?above=45>` that changes its state every second to the current temperature if the sensor reading exceeds the specified parameter value, and that changes its state to "OK" when the temperature drops below; or
- o the server could expose a parameterized resource `<coap://server/temperature?query=select+avg(temperature)+from+Sensor.window:time(30sec)>` that accepts expressions of arbitrary complexity and changes its state accordingly.

In any case, the client is notified about the current state of the resource whenever the state of the appropriately modeled resource changes. By designing resources that change their state on certain conditions, it is possible to notify the client only when these conditions occur instead of continuously supplying it with information it doesn't need.

By parameterizing resources, this is not limited to conditions defined by the server, but can be extended to arbitrarily complex conditions defined by the client. Thus, the server designer can choose exactly the right level of complexity for the application envisioned and devices used, and is not constrained to a "one size fits all" mechanism built into the protocol.

[Appendix C.](#) Changelog

(To be removed by RFC editor before publication.)

Changes from ietf-08 to ietf-09:

- o Removed the side effects of requests on existing observations. This includes removing that
 - * the client can use a GET request to cancel an observation;
 - * the server updates the entry in the list of observers instead of adding a new entry if the client is already present (#258, #281).
- o Clarified that a resource (and hence an observation relationship) is identified by the request options that are part of the Cache-Key (#258).
- o Clarified that a non-2.xx notification MUST NOT include an Observe Option.
- o Moved block-wise transfer of notifications to [I-D.ietf-core-block].

Changes from ietf-07 to ietf-08:

- o Expanded text on transmitting a notification while a previous transmission is pending (#242).
- o Changed reordering detection to use a fixed time span of 128 seconds instead of EXCHANGE_LIFETIME (#276).
- o Removed the use of the freshness model to determine if the client is still on the list of observers. This includes removing that
 - * the client assumes that it has been removed from the list of observers when Max-Age ends;
 - * the server sets the Max-Age Option of a notification to a value that indicates when the server will send the next notification;
 - * the server uses a number of retransmit attempts such that removing a client from the list of observers before Max-Age ends is avoided (#235);
 - * the server may remove the client from all lists of observers when the transmission of a confirmable notification ultimately times out.

- o Changed that an unrecognized critical option in a request must actually have no effect on the state of any observation relationship to any resource, as the option could lead to a different target resource.
- o Clarified that client implementations must be prepared to receive each notification equally as a confirmable or a non-confirmable message, regardless of the message type of the request and of any previous notification.
- o Added a requirement for sending a confirmable notification at least every 24 hours before continuing with non-confirmable notifications (#221).
- o Added congestion control considerations from [I-D.bormann-core-congestion-control-02].
- o Recommended that the client waits for a randomized time after the freshness of the latest notification expired before re-registering. This prevents that multiple clients observing a resource perform a GET request at the same time when the need to re-register arises.
- o Changed reordering detection from 'MAY' to 'SHOULD', as the goal of the protocol (to keep the observed state as closely in sync with the actual state as possible) is not optional.
- o Fixed the length of the Observe (3 bytes) in the table in [Section 2](#).
- o Replaced the 'x' in the No-Cache-Key column in the table in [Section 2](#) with a '-', as the Observe Option doesn't have the No-Cache-Key flag set, even though it is not part of the cache key.
- o Updated examples.

Changes from ietf-06 to ietf-07:

- o Moved to 24-bit sequence numbers to allow for up to 15000 notifications per second per client and resource (#217).
- o Re-numbered option number to use Unsafe/Safe and Cache-Key compliant numbers (#241).
- o Clarified how to react to a Reset message that is sent in reply to a non-confirmable notification (#225).

- o Clarified the semantics of the "obs" link target attribute (#236).

Changes from ietf-05 to ietf-06:

- o Improved abstract and introduction to say that the protocol is about best effort and eventual consistency (#219).
- o Clarified that the value of the Observe Option in a request must have zero length.
- o Added requirement that the sequence number must be updated each time a server retransmits a notification.
- o Clarified that a server must remove a client from the list of observers when it receives a GET request with an unrecognized critical option.
- o Updated the text to use the endpoint concept from [\[I-D.ietf-core-coap\]](#) (#224).
- o Improved the reordering text (#223).

Changes from ietf-04 to ietf-05:

- o Recommended that a client does not re-register while a new notification from the server is still likely to arrive. This is to avoid that the request of the client and the last notification after max-age cross over each other (#174).
- o Relaxed requirements when sending a Reset message in reply to non-confirmable notifications.
- o Added an implementation note about careless GET requests (#184).
- o Updated examples.

Changes from ietf-03 to ietf-04:

- o Removed the "Max-OFE" Option.
- o Allowed a Reset message in reply to non-confirmable notifications.
- o Added a section on cancellation.
- o Updated examples.

Changes from ietf-02 to ietf-03:

- o Separated client-side and server-side requirements.
- o Fixed uncertainty if client is still on the list of observers by introducing a liveness model based on Max-Age and a new option called "Max-OFE" (#174).
- o Simplified the text on message reordering (#129).
- o Clarified requirements for intermediaries.
- o Clarified the combination of blockwise transfers with notifications (#172).
- o Updated examples to show how the state observed by the client becomes eventually consistent with the actual state on the server.
- o Added examples for parameterization of observable resource.

Changes from ietf-01 to ietf-02:

- o Removed the requirement of periodic refreshing (#126).
- o The new "Observe" Option replaces the "Lifetime" Option.
- o Introduced a new mechanism to detect message reordering.
- o Changed 2.00 (OK) notifications to 2.05 (Content) notifications.

Changes from ietf-00 to ietf-01:

- o Changed terminology from "subscriptions" to "observation relationships" (#33).
- o Changed the name of the option to "Lifetime".
- o Clarified establishment of observation relationships.
- o Clarified that an observation is only identified by the URI of the observed resource and the identity of the client (#66).
- o Clarified rules for establishing observation relationships (#68).
- o Clarified conditions under which an observation relationship is terminated.
- o Added explanation on how clients can terminate an observation relationship before the lifetime ends (#34).

- o Clarified that the overriding objective for notifications is eventual consistency of the actual and the observed state (#67).
- o Specified how a server needs to deal with clients not acknowledging confirmable messages carrying notifications (#69).
- o Added a mechanism to detect message reordering (#35).
- o Added an explanation of how notifications can be cached, supporting both the freshness and the validation model (#39, #64).
- o Clarified that non-GET requests do not affect observation relationships, and that GET requests without "Lifetime" Option affecting relationships is by design (#65).
- o Described interaction with blockwise transfers (#36).
- o Added Resource Discovery section (#99).
- o Added IANA Considerations.
- o Added Security Considerations (#40).
- o Added examples (#38).

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