Regular expressions Pattern matching syntax

START HERE

abc
Literal text

(...)
Group and capture

.
Any one character

colou?r
Optional part

\d+
One or more digits

[a-z]
One of a set

^...$
Whole line

a|b
Either or

Anchor ^ \b \A → **then** **Atom** a . \d [abc] (...) → **repeated by** **Quantifier** ? * + {n,m} → **joined by** **Alternation** a|b

CONCEPTS

A regex is matched left to right: at each position the engine tries the whole pattern and moves on if it fails.

Flavours differ. This sheet follows PCRE2 (Perl-style), also used by PHP and grep -P; JavaScript, Python and POSIX tools lack some features.

Prefer a specific class over .* : greedy wildcards cause surprising matches and slow backtracking.

CHARACTERS

.
Any char except newline
With the s flag it matches newlines too.

\d \w \s
Digit, word char, space
Uppercase \D \W \S is the negation. ASCII only unless Unicode mode is on.

[abc]
Any one of a, b, c

[^abc]
Any char except a, b, c

[a-z0-9]
Ranges inside a set

CHARACTERS (cont.)

\.
Escape a metacharacter
*Metacharacters: . ^ $ * + ? ( ) [ ] { } | *

\n \t \r
Newline, tab, carriage return

\x41 \x{263A}
Character by hex code

[[:alpha:]]
POSIX class inside a set
Also digit, alnum, upper, lower, space, punct, xdigit.

\h \v \R
Horizontal space, vertical space, any line break

\Q...\E
Treat text literally

\p{L} \p{Lu}
Unicode letter, uppercase letter
Needs Unicode mode (UTF) to see non-ASCII text.

\p{Greek}
Unicode script

QUANTIFIERS

*****
Zero or more

+
One or more

?
Zero or one (optional)

{n}
Exactly n times

QUANTIFIERS (cont.)

{n,m}
Between n and m times

{n,}
At least n times

***? +? ??**
Lazy: as few as possible
Classic use: <.+?> matches one tag, <.+> swallows the line.

***+ ++ ?+**
Possessive: never give back
Faster failure; cannot backtrack into the match.

ANCHORS

^ $
Start, end of line
Without the m flag: start of text, end of text (or before a final newline).

\b
Word boundary

\B
Not a word boundary

\A \z
Start, end of text

\Z
End, before a final newline

\G
Where the previous match ended

GROUPS

(...)
Capture group

GROUPS (cont.)

a|b
Alternation
Lowest precedence: gr(a|e)y, not gra|ey.

(?:...)
Group without capturing

(?<*name*>...)
Named capture group

\1 \2
Backreference to group n
(\w)\1 finds doubled letters.

\k<*name*>
Backreference by name

(?>...)
Atomic group
Once matched, the engine will not backtrack into it.

(?|...)
Branch reset: reuse group numbers

(?#...)
Inline comment

LOOKAROUND

(?=...)
Followed by (lookahead)

(?!...)
Not followed by

(?<=...)
Preceded by (lookbehind)
Each lookbehind branch must have a bounded length.

LOOKAROUND (cont.)

(?<!...)
Not preceded by

\K
Reset start of reported match
Keeps the text before it out of the match; handy in replacements.

Zero-width checks

Syntax	Asserts
(?=x)	x comes next
(?!x)	x does not come next
(?<=x)	x comes before
(?<!x)	x does not come before

FLAGS

(?i)
Ignore case
Applies to the rest of the pattern or group.

(?m)
^ and $ match at each line

(?s)
Dot matches newline

(?x)
Free-spacing: ignore blanks, allow #comments

(?i:...)
Flag for one group only

(?-i)
Turn a flag off

(*UCP)
Make \d \w \s Unicode-aware
Place at the very start of the pattern.

ADVANCED

(?R)
Recurse the whole pattern
Matches nested brackets, e.g. \((?:[^()]|(?R))\).*

(?1) (?&name)
Call a group as a subroutine

(?(1)yes|no)
Conditional on a group

(?(DEFINE)...)
Define named groups for reuse

(*SKIP)(*FAIL)
Match then discard (skip this)

(*ACCEPT)
End the match successfully

RECIPES

Integer or decimal

```
^-?\d+(?:\.\d+)?$
```

ISO date with named parts

```
(?<y>\d{4})-(?<m>\d{2})-(?
<d>\d{2})
```

Trim trailing whitespace

```
# match, replace with nothing
[ \t]+$   (with (?m))
```

Value after a key

```
# match only the number
price=\K\d+
# or with lookbehind
(?<=price=)\d+
```

Simple email (loose)

```
^[\w.+-]+@[\w-]+(?:\.[\w-]+)+$
```