Regular expressions Pattern matching syntax

CONCEPTS

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

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

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

CHARACTERS

.
Any char except newline

\d \w \s
Digit, word char, space

[abc]
Any one of a, b, c

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

[a-z0-9]
Ranges inside a set

\.
Escape a metacharacter

QUANTIFIERS

*****
Zero or more

+
One or more

?
Zero or one (optional)

{n}
Exactly n times

QUANTIFIERS (cont.)

{n,m}
Between n and m times

***? +? ??**
Lazy: as few as possible

ANCHORS

^ $
Start, end of line

\b
Word boundary

GROUPS

(...)
Capture group

a|b
Alternation

(?:...)
Group without capturing

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

\1 \2
Backreference to group n

LOOKAROUND

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

(?!...)
Not followed by

(?<=...)
Preceded by (lookbehind)

FLAGS

(?i)
Ignore case

(?m)
^ and $ match at each line

(?s)
Dot matches newline