

4. DEBUGGING

Errors in Regular Expressions

Introduction

Creating Regular Expressions is like every other skill we learn in life, the more we practice doing them, the better we will get at them. When we start writing them, we might construct them wrong sometimes, so we need to check whether or not the Regular Expression is doing what we want it to do, or not.

A Simple Example

Let's imagine we were doing our example of searching for "Damian" or "Damien", but we put the period in the wrong place, so instead of "Dami.n", we did this:

```
RegEx_Pattern = "Dam.an"
```

we can easily see there is an error (or "bug") in the RegEx, because it's a simple example. However, if we tested it on the word "Damian", it would work, but if we tested it on the word "Damien", it wouldn't work. So, we need to test our Regular Expressions on things we expect it to match, and things it shouldn't match with.

How long will it really take?

When people are learning to write Regular Expressions by themselves, a lot of them experience a similar cycle; in the beginning, it takes them about 5 minutes to write a Regular Expression, and 25 minutes to fix it (to get it working exactly the way they want). After a few weeks, one of two things happen; either they give up and decide Regular Expressions are too hard for them, or they hang in there, and after a few more weeks they become Regular Expression Wizards, which doesn't mean that they get everything right first time, it just means it takes a much shorter period of time to fix any issues, so, maybe 5 minutes to write them, and 5 minutes to fix them.

The lessons we are doing here will make it a lot easier to understand how to write Regular Expressions, and because we are doing it one page at a time, we are learning in a slow and steady manner, so we should never get to a place where the content is too hard for us, but it is also important that we aren't too hard on ourselves. So, we can't expect ourselves to be brilliant at Regular Expressions immediately, and even once we become proficient using them, we should still treat them like writing an essay or an e-mail, we should have the expectation that we will have to draft and redraft a few times to make the content better quality. So, this is my golden rule:

We will spend at least **50%** *of our time redrafting our Regexes*

So as long as we don't expect that it will all work out first time, everything is easier.

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