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# **Introduction to Cross Site Scripting using WebGoat**

The OWASP LiveCD Education Project

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## A1 Abstract

Cross Site Scripting is one of the most common web vulnerabilities in existence today, and subsequently one of the most exploited issues.

This tutorial is geared towards someone who may have heard of cross site scripting, and may even understand the concepts behind it, but would benefit by seeing real examples and having the opportunity to experiment with them.

## A2 Prerequisites

WebGoat – A deliberately insecure application maintained by OWASP. There are several ways you can setup WebGoat which will be outlined later in this document.

Web Browser – FireFox was used for this tutorial, but most any web browser should work.

## A3 Objective

Setup a working WebGoat installation, gain a understanding of what cross site scripting is and how it works, and work through some basic cross site scripting attacks.

## A4 Background on Cross Site Scripting

The term “Cross Site Scripting” can be a bit confusing as it might imply some sort of script that is used for evil purposes across multiple areas of a web site. To add further to the confusion, it started off being referred to as “CSS” which also stands for “Cascading Syle Sheets”. Now days it is most commonly referred to as “XSS”, or simply spelled out completely as Cross Site Scripting.

So what is XSS? It is simply tricking a web server into delivering malicious content to another user. The server is the delivery mechanism, but the malicious code runs in the victims web browser.

XSS attacks are divided into two main categories; reflected and stored. A third type called DOM Based XSS exists but is out of the scope of this tutorial. If you wish to read about DOM Based attacks, check out the paper written by Amit Klein at <http://www.webappsec.org/projects/articles/071105.html>

A reflected XSS (non-persistent) attack is one that uses a separate mechanism such as a second web server, an email, or some other delivery mechanism. The effect is the same, but the attack is interactive. For example, a person sends an email with a link to a well known web site. The link seems harmless because it goes to a known site, but the link also contains extra code that runs a malicious script from another site. The URL can be encoded also, obscuring the malicious portion which makes it difficult to identify.



A stored XSS (also referred to as “persistent”) attack works like this. A person stores content with embedded malicious code on a web page, in a guest book, or any other permanent place on a server. Unsuspecting users later view that content and the malicious code executes in their browser. This makes stored attacks more dangerous because even a XSS savvy person would have no way of anticipating the attack until it is too late.

In the earlier days of the Internet, most web pages were static. A user could view a web page, but could not add to it or modify the content. Today lots of web pages have dynamic content, many of which are vulnerable to stored XSS attacks.

Ok, now that we have a basic understanding of what XSS is, let's fire up WebGoat and work through a couple live examples.

## A5 WebGoat Setup

WebGoat can be setup and used in multiple environments including:

- **OWASP Live CD (LabRat)** – LabRat is a compilation of security tools that includes WebGoat. The LabRat CD is a downloadable .ISO image that once burned to a CD can run on any PC that can boot from CD. It uses a “live” Linux distribution that does not affect the operating system installed on your hard drive. You can use WebGoat and the entire collection of LabRat tools without installing anything. The LabRat .ISO file can also be run under VMware if you prefer.
- **Linux Installation**
- **Windows Installation**

For this tutorial a Windows installation of WebGoat was used, but feel free to use whatever method works best for you. If you decide to use the Live CD, VMware, or a Linux installation, just skip past the next session and go directly to the examples.

Links to all of the WebGoat versions and the OWASP Live CD can be found under the download section at <http://owasp.org>

### Windows WebGoat Installation:

To get Webgoat, visit <http://owasp.org> and go to the downloads section. Select the link for WebGoat, then the link for “OWASP Source Code Center at Sourceforge” to get to the download area for the Windows version of WebGoat.

Download Windows\_WebGoat-5.0\_Release.zip and save it to your local drive. Double-click the .zip file and copy the WebGoat-5.0 folder to wherever you like on your system.

Before launching WebGoat, please review the readme.txt file included with it. It is important to understand that WebGoat creates an intentionally insecure web site on your system that could be used to attack you if your system is on a network without a firewall between you and other users. Also mentioned in the readme file is the importance of limiting security testing to only systems that you own, or have permission to work with. A person can quickly get themselves into trouble testing the security of other systems even if their intentions are good.

Now that we have that out of the way, let's begin by starting WebGoat. Navigate to the WebGoat-5.0 directory where there are two batch files you can launch it with. Wwebgoat.bat will start it using port 80, and webgoat\_8080.bat will do the same thing but the web server will listen on port 8080.



WebGoat has a Tomcat web server built in that requires no configuration, making it really easy to get a test system up with minimal effort.

Launch the webgoat\_8080.bat file by double-clicking on it.

You may receive a message from the Windows firewall asking if you want to allow communications or keep blocking, select allow.

Now startup your browser and enter <http://localhost:8080/WebGoat/attack>

Note: The URL is case sensitive.

You will be prompted to login. Enter "guest" for the username and the password.

The screenshot shows a Windows-style authentication dialog box titled "Authentication Required" with a question mark icon. The text inside reads: "Enter username and password for 'WebGoat Application' at http://localhost:8080". There are two input fields: "User Name:" containing "guest" and "Password:" containing "\*\*\*\*\*". Below the fields is a checkbox labeled "Use Password Manager to remember this password." which is unchecked. "OK" and "Cancel" buttons are at the bottom.

Below the dialog is a Mozilla Firefox browser window titled "WebGoat V5 - Mozilla Firefox". The address bar shows "http://localhost:8080/WebGoat/attack". The page content includes a red banner with a goat head logo and the text "OWASP WebGoat V5". Below the banner, it says "Thank you for using WebGoat!" followed by a paragraph: "This program is a demonstration of common web application flaws. The exercises are intended to provide hands on experience with application penetration testing techniques. The WebGoat project is lead by Bruce Mayhew. Please send all comments to Bruce at WebGoat@G2-Inc.com." There are two logos: "OWASP The Open Web Application Security Project" and "ASPECT SECURITY Application Security Specialists". Below the logos are four columns of text: "WebGoat Design Team" (Bruce Mayhew, Laurence Casey, David Anderson, Eric Sheridan), "Lesson Contributors" (Aspect Security, Sherif Koussa, Alex Smolen, Chuck Willis), "Special Thanks for V5" (Sherif Koussa, OWASP Autumn of Code), and "Documentation Contributors" (Robert Sullivan, Sherif Koussa). At the bottom center is a "Start WebGoat" button. A red "WARNING" box at the bottom states: "While running this program, your machine is extremely vulnerable to attack. You should disconnect from the network while using this program. This program is for educational purposes only. Use of these techniques without permission could lead to job termination, financial liability, and/or criminal penalties." The status bar at the very bottom says "Done".



You should now be at the main WebGoat web page. Click the “Start WebGoat” button.

When the next page comes up, click on “Cross Site Scripting (XSS)” on the left side to expand the XSS section of WebGoat.

LAB: Cross Site Scripting (XSS) - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

http://localhost:8080/WebGoat/attack?Screen=166&menu=410

Logout ?

LAB: Cross Site Scripting (XSS)

OWASP WebGoat V5

Hints Show Params Show Cookies Show Java Lesson Plans

Admin Functions  
General  
Code Quality  
Unvalidated Parameters  
Broken Access Control  
Broken Authentication and Session Management  
Cross-Site Scripting (XSS)

Restart this Lesson

Stage 1: Execute a Stored Cross Site Scripting (XSS) attack.  
For this exercise, your mission is to cause the application to serve a script of your making to some other user.

Goat Hills Financial  
Human Resources

Please Login

Larry Stoooge (employee)

Password

Login

LAB: Cross Site Scripting (XSS)  
How to Perform Stored Cross Site Scripting (XSS)  
How to Perform Reflected Cross Site Scripting (XSS) Attacks  
HTTPOnly Test  
How to Perform Cross Site Tracing (XST) Attacks

Buffer Overflows  
Injection Flaws  
Improper Error Handling  
Insecure Storage  
Denial of Service  
Insecure Configuration Management  
Web Services  
AJAX Security  
Challenge

## A6 Examples of XSS attacks

Let's try a reflected XSS attack.... Click on the link “How to Perform Reflected Cross Site Scripting (XSS) Attacks”.



This page on WebGoat page resembles a typical shopping cart checkout page. The inputs to this page include the quantities for the items selected, the credit card number, and the three digit access code for the credit card. You can change quantities and click on update and the page will update the prices.

As you might have guessed, this page has a XSS vulnerability. The three digit access code field does not have any input validation. In a real world application like this, we would want to only allow numeric digits to be entered into the access code field, and limit the length to three.

Remember that we are trying to perform a reflected attack, so we want to provide input to the server that includes some extra content that will be sent back to your browser when it redisplay the page.

Try adding the following script to the end of the access code field, and click "Purchase".

```
<SCRIPT>alert("Ahh! I've been attacked!")</SCRIPT>
```

How to Perform Reflected Cross Site Scripting (XSS) Attacks - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

Logout ?

## How to Perform Reflected Cross Site Scripting (XSS) Attacks

OWASP WebGoat V5

◀ Hints ▶ Show Params Show Cookies Show Java Lesson Plans

Admin Functions Restart this Lesson

- General
- Code Quality
- Unvalidated Parameters
- Broken Access Control
- Broken Authentication and Session Management
- Cross-Site Scripting (XSS)

[LAB: Cross Site Scripting \(XSS\)](#)

- [How to Perform Stored Cross Site Scripting \(XSS\)](#)
- [How to Perform Reflected Cross Site Scripting \(XSS\) Attacks](#)
- [HTTPOnly Test](#)
- [How to Perform Cross Site Tracing \(XST\) Attacks](#)

- Buffer Overflows
- Injection Flaws
- Improper Error Handling
- Insecure Storage
- Denial of Service
- Insecure Configuration Management
- Web Services
- AJAX Security Challenge

For this exercise, your mission is to come up with some input containing a script. You have to try to get this page to reflect that input back to your browser, which will execute the script and do something bad.

Shopping Cart			
Shopping Cart Items -- To Buy Now	Price:	Quantity:	Total
Studio RTA - Laptop/Reading Cart with Tilting Surface - Cherry	69.99	2	\$139.98
Dynex - Traditional Notebook Case	27.99	3	\$83.97
Hewlett-Packard - Pavilion Notebook with Intel® Centrino?	1599.99	1	\$1599.99
3 - Year Performance Service Plan \$1000 and Over	299.99	1	\$299.99

The total charged to your credit card: \$2123.93 Update Cart

Enter your credit card number:

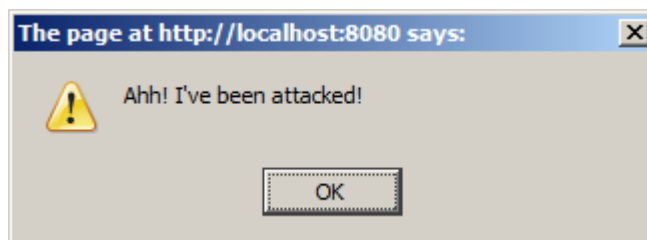
Enter your three digit access code:

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If it worked correctly, you should see the message below displayed.



So what happened here? When you clicked the “Purchase” button, the data input into the form was submitted to the web server. The server side code did not perform any validation on the access code field, allowing the script code to be accepted along with the “111” access code. When the server sent the updated information back, the script was included which executed in your browser.

While this is entertaining, you might be wondering how this type of attack can be used. Obviously people are not going to accidentally attack themselves with script code, but what if someone sends you a link to a web page that has a script embedded into the URL? A malicious URL can be sent out to thousands of people via SPAM, Instant Messaging, or mechanisms. While this example is harmless, there are endless possibilities of what can be done.

#### **Example of a Stored XSS attack:**

Stored XSS attacks can be more dangerous for several reasons. First off, it is easier to get someone to run it. When you receive unsolicited email, you probably don't click on the links they may contain. But what if you are simply reading messages on a forum you visit regularly? Embedded scripts can launch automatically when the message is displayed.

To make matters worse, you may be logged into a site when your browser executes the malicious code. This makes it much easier for a script to steal cookies, allowing the attacker to hijack your session. Again, the possibilities are endless as to what can be done.

Now let's try an example of a stored XSS attack. This attack would primarily be annoying for the recipients, but it could create a DOS (Denial of Service) condition if enough people viewed the content simultaneously. Click on the “How to Perform Stored Cross Site Scripting (XSS)” link.

This page of WebGoat simulates a message board. You can enter a title and message text, click Save, and it will be listed in the Message List at the bottom of the page. Enter a message like the one in the screenshot below and then click “Submit”.

The message title and content are not important, only the script portion:

```
<META HTTP-EQUIV="refresh" CONTENT="0">
```

How to Perform Stored Cross Site Scripting (XSS) - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

Logout ?

## How to Perform Stored Cross Site Scripting (XSS)

OWASP WebGoat V5

◀ Hints ▶ Show Params Show Cookies Show Java Lesson Plans

Admin Functions Restart this Lesson

General  
Code Quality  
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Cross-Site Scripting (XSS)

[LAB: Cross Site Scripting \(XSS\)](#)  
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[How to Perform Reflected Cross Site Scripting \(XSS\) Attacks](#)  
[HTTPOnly Test](#)  
[How to Perform Cross Site Tracing \(XST\) Attacks](#)

Buffer Overflows  
Injection Flaws  
Improper Error Handling  
Insecure Storage  
Denial of Service  
Insecure Configuration Management  
Web Services  
AJAX Security  
Challenge

It is always a good practice to scrub all input, especially those inputs that will later be used as parameters to OS commands, scripts, and database queries. It is particularly important for content that will be permanently stored somewhere in the application. Users should not be able to create message content that could cause another user to load an undesirable page or undesirable content when the user's message is retrieved.

Title:

Message:

---

### Message List

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After the page refreshes, your message title will be displayed in “Message List” at the bottom of the page. Click on it to see the results.

You should see a page like the one below. If you successfully entered the HTML portion of the message, it should be refreshing repeatedly in your browser. Just hit your browser's stop button when it becomes annoying.



How to Perform Stored Cross Site Scripting (XSS) - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

Logout ?

## How to Perform Stored Cross Site Scripting (XSS)

OWASP WebGoat V5

◀ Hints ▶ Show Params Show Cookies Show Java Lesson Plans

Restart this Lesson

Admin Functions  
General  
Code Quality  
Unvalidated Parameters  
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It is always a good practice to scrub all input, especially those inputs that will later be used as parameters to OS commands, scripts, and database queries. It is particularly important for content that will be permanently stored somewhere in the application. Users should not be able to create message content that could cause another user to load an undesirable page or undesirable content when the user's message is retrieved.

Title:

Message:

Submit

---

**Message Contents For: DOS version 6.22**  
**Title:** DOS version 6.22  
**Message:** Why does this page keep reloading?!?!?  
Posted By:guest

---

**Message List**  
[DOS version 6.22](#)

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Notice that the HTML portion of the message is intercepted by your browser and does not get displayed.

This concludes the examples for this tutorial. Hopefully you have gained a basic understanding of how stored and reflected XSS attacks work. Now that you have a functional WebGoat installation you may want to explore the other lab examples included with it.

## A7 Conclusion

This concludes the examples for this tutorial. Hopefully you have gained a basic understanding of how stored and reflected XSS attacks work. Now that you have a functional WebGoat installation you may want to explore the other lab examples included with it.

## A8 About the Author

Brian Blankenship works as a Consulting Security Analyst focusing on vulnerability management for Kindred Healthcare in Louisville, KY. He has twenty years of experience with information systems and maintains CISSP and SANS GSEC certifications.