

# Vmod-Dbrw User Manual

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# 1 Introduction to vmod-dbrw

Vmod-dbrw is a module for Varnish Cache<sup>1</sup> which implements database-driven rewrite rules. These rules may be similar to `RewriteRule` directives implemented by `mod_rewrite`<sup>2</sup> module in Apache or to `Redirect` directives of its `mod_alias` module. What distinguishes the vmod-dbrw rules from these, is that they are handled by Varnish, before the request reaches the httpd server, and that they are stored in an SQL database, which makes them easily manageable.

Some web sites implement thousands of rewrite rules. The purpose of this module is to facilitate deploying and handling them.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.varnish-cache.org>

<sup>2</sup> <http://httpd.apache.org/docs/current/rewrite/>





## 2 Overview

Rewrite rules are stored in a MySQL or PostgreSQL database. The `vmod-dbrw` module does not impose any restrictions on its schema. It only needs to know the SQL query which is to be used to retrieve data. This query is supplied to the module, along with the credentials for accessing the database, by calling the `config` function in the `vcl_recv` subroutine of the Varnish configuration file.

Once the module is configured, the `rewrite` function can be called in the appropriate place of the Varnish configuration file. Its argument is a list of variable assignments separated by semicolons, each assignment having the form `name=value`. When called, `rewrite` expands the SQL query registered with the prior call to `config` by replacing each `$name` construct (a *variable reference*) with the corresponding *value* from its argument. Similarly to the shell syntax, the variable reference can also be written as `${name}`. This latter form can be used in contexts where the variable reference is immediately followed by a letter, digit or underscore, to prevent it from being counted as a part of the name. Special syntax is available for substituting default values and invoking built-in functions during the expansion of the query. See [Section 3.1 \[Expansions\], page 7](#), for a detailed description of these.

Having undergone expansions, the query is sent to the database server. If the query returns no records or if an error occurred, `rewrite` returns empty string. In case of error, it also sets the HTTP header `'X-VMOD-DBRW-Error: 1'`. It can be used in VLC code to provide a special handling for such failures.

The returned set of records (if non-empty) is processed depending on the number of fields it contains.

If the returned set has one or two columns, only the first tuple is used and `rewrite` returns the value of its first column.

Otherwise, if the returned set has three or more columns, the regular expression matching is performed. For the purpose of this discussion, let's refer to the columns as follows: *result*, *regexp*, *value* and *flags*. The *flags* column is optional. Any surplus columns are ignored.

For each returned tuple, the *value* column undergoes variable expansion, using the same algorithm as when preparing the query, and the resulting string is matched with the *regexp* column, which is treated as an extended POSIX regular expression. If the value matches the expression, the *result* column is expanded by replacing *backreferences*: each occurrence of `$digit` (where *digit* stands for a decimal digit from '0' through '9') is replaced by the contents of the *digits* parenthesized subexpression in *regexp*. For compatibility with the traditional usage, the `\digit` notation is also allowed. The resulting value is then returned to the caller.

Optional *flags* column is a comma-separated list of flags that control the matching algorithm.

- 'NC'            Treat *regexp* as case-insensitive regular expression.
- 'nocase'        Treat *regexp* as case-insensitive regular expression.
- 'case'         Treat *regexp* as case-sensitive (default).
- 'eq'            Use exact string matching.
- 'QSA'            Treat the resulting value as URL; append any query string from the original *value* to it.
- 'qsappend'
- 'QSD'            Treat the resulting value as URL; discard any query string attached to the original *value*.
- 'qsdiscard'
- 'redirect=*code*'    On success, set the 'X-VMOD-DBRW-Status' header to *code*, which must be a valid HTTP status code.
- 'R=*code*'        On success, set the 'X-VMOD-DBRW-Status' header to *code*, which must be a valid HTTP status code.
- 'regex'         Use regular expression matching. This is the default. This flag is provided for completeness sake, as a counterpart of 'eq'.

If *regexp* or *value* is NULL, strict matching is assumed (see [strict matching], page 3).

If *flags* is NULL, it is ignored.

## 3 Configuration

`void config (string dbtype, string params, string query)` [function]

This function configures the module and provides it with the data necessary to connect and use the database. It is normally called from the `vcl_recv` subroutine.

Arguments:

*dbtype* Type of the database to use. Valid values are ‘mysql’ and ‘pgsql’.

*params* Database connection parameters. This is a list of ‘*name=value*’ assignments separated by semicolons. The *value* part can be any sequence of characters, excepting white space and semicolon. If *value* contains any of these, they either must be escaped by prepending them with a backslash, or the entire *value* must be enclosed in a pair of (single or double) quotes. The following *escape sequences* are allowed for use in *value*:

Sequence	Replaced by
<code>\a</code>	Audible bell character (ASCII 7)
<code>\b</code>	Backspace character (ASCII 8)
<code>\f</code>	Form-feed character (ASCII 12)
<code>\n</code>	Newline character (ASCII 10)
<code>\r</code>	Carriage return character (ASCII 13)
<code>\t</code>	Horizontal tabulation character (ASCII 9)
<code>\v</code>	Vertical tabulation character (ASCII 11)

Table 3.1: Backslash escapes

If a backslash is immediately followed by a symbol not listed in the above table, it is removed and the symbol is reproduced verbatim.

Valid parameters are:

‘**debug=*n***’ Set debugging level. Argument is a decimal number.

‘**server=*host***’

Name or IP address of the database server to connect to. If not defined, localhost (‘127.0.0.1’) is assumed. For MySQL databases, if *host* begins with a slash, its value is taken to be the full pathname of the local UNIX socket to connect to.

- `'port=n'` Port number on the `'server'` to connect to. Default is `'3306'` for MySQL and `5432` for Postgres.
- `'database=name'`  
The name of the database to use.
- `'config=filename'`  
(MySQL-specific) Read database access credentials and other parameters from the MySQL options file *filename*.
- `'group=name'`  
(MySQL-specific) Read credentials from section *name* of the options file supplied with the `config` parameter. Default section name is `'client'`.
- `'cacert=filename'`  
Use secure connection to the database server via SSL. The *filename* argument is a full pathname of the certificate authority file.
- `'timeout=n'`  
Sets idle timeout for a single connection. The connection will be closed and opened again if the module is to use it after *n* or more seconds since its last use. Set `'timeout=-1'` to disable idle timeout (session will remain open until the SQL server closes it). Set `'timeout=0'` to close the connection after each request (not recommended).  
  
The default depends on the selected SQL backend. For MySQL, it equals the value of the `'wait_timeout'` global variable. For PostgreSQL, it is `'-1'`.
- `'options=string'`  
(Postgres-specific) Connection options.
- `'user=name'`  
Database user name.
- `'password=string'`  
Password to access the database.
- query* The SQL query to use. It can contain variable references (`$name` or `${name}`), which will be expanded to the actual value of the *name* argument to the function `rewrite`. See [Section 3.1 \[Expansions\]](#), page 7, for details.

The example below configures `vmod-dbrw` to use MySQL database `'rewrite'`, with the user name `'varnish'` and password `'guessme'`.

```
import dbrw;

sub vcl_recv {
    dbrw.config("mysql",
        "database=rewrite;user=varnish;password=gues sme",
        {"SELECT dest
         FROM redirects
         WHERE host='$host'
         AND url='$url'"});
}
```

### 3.1 Expansions

The ‘query’ argument to the `dbrw.config` function normally contains variable references. A variable reference has the form ‘`$variable`’ or ‘`${variable}`’, where *variable* is the variable name. When the `dbrw.rewrite` function (see [Chapter 5 \[Rewrite\], page 13](#)) is called, each such reference is expanded to the actual value of *variable* passed in the argument to that function.

The two forms are entirely equivalent. The form with curly braces is normally used if the variable name is immediately followed by an alphanumeric symbol, which will otherwise be considered a part of it. This form also allows for specifying the action to take if the variable is undefined or expands to an empty value.

During variable expansion, the forms below cause `dbrw.rewrite` to test for a variable that is unset or null (i.e., whose value is an empty string). Omitting the colon results in a test only for a variable that is unset.

`${variable:-word}`

*Use Default Values.* If *variable* is unset or null, the expansion of *word* is substituted. Otherwise, the value of *variable* is substituted.

`${variable:=word}`

*Assign Default Values.* If *variable* is unset or null, the expansion of *word* is assigned to *variable*. The value of *variable* is then substituted.

`${variable:?word}`

*Display Error if Null or Unset.* If *variable* is null or unset, the expansion of *word* (or a message to that effect if *word* is not present) is output to the current logging channel. Otherwise, the value of *variable* is substituted.

`${variable:+word}`

*Use Alternate Value.* If *variable* is null or unset, nothing is substituted, otherwise the expansion of *word* is substituted.

After expanding variables, the query undergoes *command expansion*. Syntactically, a command invocation is

`$(cmd args)`

where *cmd* is the command name, and *args* is a list of arguments separated by whitespace. Arguments can in turn contain variable and command references.

During command expansion, each invocation is replaced by the result of the call to function *cmd* with the supplied arguments.

As of version 2.5 of `vmod-dbrw`, only one function is declared:

**urlprefixes** *uri* [Command]  
Expands to comma-separated list of path prefixes contained in *uri*, starting from the longest one (*uri* itself, with eventual query part stripped off). Single `'/'` is not included in the list. Each list item is quoted. The expansion can be used in the `'IN ()'` SQL conditional.

## 4 Writing Queries

The query supplied to the `config` function depends on the database schema and on the desired kind of matching (e.g. exact vs. wildcard). To ensure the best performance of the module it is important to design the schema and the query so that the database look up be as fast as possible.

Suppose that you plan to use `vmod-dbrw` to implement redirection rules based on strict matching (see [\[strict matching\]](#), page 3).

The simplest database structure for this purpose (assuming MySQL) will be:

```
CREATE TABLE redirects (
  id INT AUTO_INCREMENT,
  host varchar(255) NOT NULL DEFAULT '',
  url varchar(255) NOT NULL DEFAULT '',
  dest varchar(255) DEFAULT NULL,
  PRIMARY KEY (host,url)
);
```

The columns and their purpose are:

id	An integer uniquely identifying the row. It is useful for table management purposes (e.g. deleting the row).
host	Host part of the incoming request.
url	URL part of the incoming request.
dest	Destination URL to redirect to.

The rewrite function looks up a row that has ‘`host`’ and ‘`url`’ matching the incoming request and, if found, returns the value of its ‘`dest`’ column. The corresponding query is:

```
SELECT dest FROM redirects WHERE host='$host' AND url='$url'
```

The variables ‘`host`’ and ‘`url`’ are supposed to contain the actual host and URL parts of the incoming request.

Handling regular expression matches is a bit trickier. Your query should first return such rows that could possibly match the request. Then the `vmod-dbrw` engine will do the rest, by iterating over the returned set and finding the row that actually matches the request. It will iterate over the rows in the order they were returned by the database server, so it might be necessary to sort them by some criterion beforehand.

The following is an example table structure:

```
CREATE TABLE rewrite (
  id INT AUTO_INCREMENT,
  host varchar(255) NOT NULL DEFAULT '',
  url varchar(255) NOT NULL DEFAULT '',
  dest varchar(255) DEFAULT NULL,
  value varchar(255) DEFAULT NULL,
  pattern varchar(255) DEFAULT NULL,
  flags char(64) DEFAULT NULL,
  weight int NOT NULL DEFAULT '0',
  KEY source (host,url)
);
```

The meaning of `id`, `host`, and `dest` is the same as in the previous example. The meaning of `url` is described below. Other columns are (see [\[regex matching\]](#), page 3):

`value`        The value to be compared with the pattern.  
`pattern`      Regular expression to use.  
`flags`        Optional flags.  
`weight`      Relative weight of this row in the set. Rows will be sorted by this column, in ascending order.

The simplest way to select candidate rows is by their ‘`host`’ column:

```
SELECT dest,pattern,value,flags
FROM rewrite
WHERE host='$host'
ORDER BY weight
```

One can further abridge the returned set by selecting only those rows whose `url` column is the prefix of the requested URL:

```
SELECT dest,pattern,value,flags
FROM rewrite
WHERE host='$host'
AND LOCATE(url,'$url')==1
ORDER BY weight
```

Furthermore, the `url` column can contain a path prefix, which can be matched using the `IN` conditional:

```
SELECT dest,pattern,value,flags
FROM rewrite
WHERE host='$host'
AND url IN ($(urlprefixes $url))
ORDER BY weight
```

Notice the use of the ‘`$(urlprefixes $url)`’. This invokes the built-in *function* `urlprefixes`, which expands to comma-separated list of properly quoted pathname prefixes, constructed from its argument. For example, if ‘`$url`’ is ‘`/local/user/local?a=1`’, then the expansion of ‘`$(urlprefixes $url)`’ is:



```
 '/local/user/local', '/local/user', '/local'
```



## 5 The `rewrite` Function

`string rewrite` (*string args*) [function]

This function is the working horse of the module. It rewrites its argument using the database configured in the previous call to `config` and returns the obtained value.

To do so, it performs the following steps:

- Parameter parsing

The *args* parameter must be a list of *name=value* pairs separated by semicolons. The function parses this string and builds a symbol table.

- Variable expansion

Using the symbol table built in the previous stage, each occurrence of `$name` or `${name}` is replaced by the actual value of the variable *name* from the table. Expanding an undefined variable is considered an error.

- Establishing the database connection

Unless the connection has already been established by a prior call to `rewrite`, the function establishes it using the parameters supplied earlier in a call to `config`. If the connection fails, the function returns NULL immediately.

Database connections are persisting and thread-specific. This means that each thread keeps its own connection to the database and attempts to re-establish it if it goes down for some reason.

- Query execution

The query is sent to the server and the resulting set collected from it.

- Result interpretation

The resulting set is interpreted as described in [\[result interpretation\]](#), [page 3](#). This results in a single value being returned to the caller.

Assuming the database structure similar to the one discussed in the previous chapter, the following example illustrates how to use `rewrite` to redirect the incoming request.

```

sub vcl_recv {
    dbrw.config("mysql",
        "database=rewrite;user=varnish;password=gues sme",
        {"SELECT dest
         FROM redirects
         WHERE host='$host'
         AND url='$url'"});
    set req.http.X-Redirect-To =
        dbrw.rewrite("host=" + req.http.Host + ";" +
            "url=" + req.url);
    if (req.http.X-Redirect-To != "") {
        return(synth(301, "Redirect"));
    }
}

```

The ‘synth’ sub must be provided in order to construct redirection responses:

```

import std;

sub vcl_synth {
    if (resp.status == 301) {
        set resp.http.Location = req.http.X-Redirect-To;
        if (req.http.X-VMOD-DBRW-Status != "") {
            set resp.status =
                std.integer(req.http.X-VMOD-DBRW-Status, 301);
        }
        return (deliver);
    }
}

```

The `X-VMOD-DBRW-Status` header, if set, contains the status code to be returned to the client (see [\[X-VMOD-DBRW-Status\]](#), page 4). Notice the use of the `vmod_std` module to cast it to integer.

If an error occurred during the rewrite, it is recommended to not cache the response. This way the next request will call rewrite again and eventually complete the rewriting. This can be achieved using the following `vcl_backend_response` fragment:

```

sub vcl_backend_response
{
    if (bereq.http.X-VMOD-DBRW-Error == "1") {
        set beresp.uncacheable = true;
        return (deliver);
    }
}

```

## 6 How to Report a Bug

Email bug reports to [gray@gnu.org](mailto:gray@gnu.org).

As the purpose of bug reporting is to improve software, please be sure to include a detailed information when reporting a bug. The minimum information needed is:

- Module version you use.
- A description of the bug.
- Conditions under which the bug appears.
- It is often helpful to send the contents of `config.log` file along with your bug report. This file is created after running `./configure` in `vmod-dbrw` source root directory.



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Version 1.2, November 2002

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This is a general index of all issues discussed in this manual

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