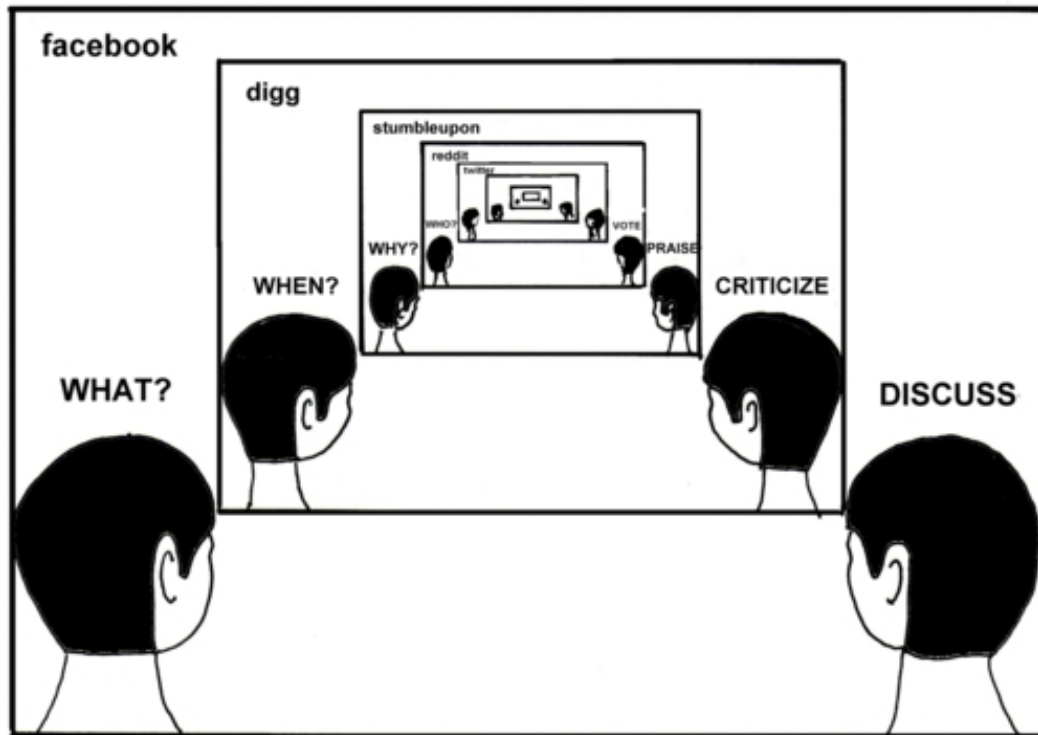# Building Java Programs

Chapter 12
Lecture 12-1: introduction to recursion

reading: 12.1
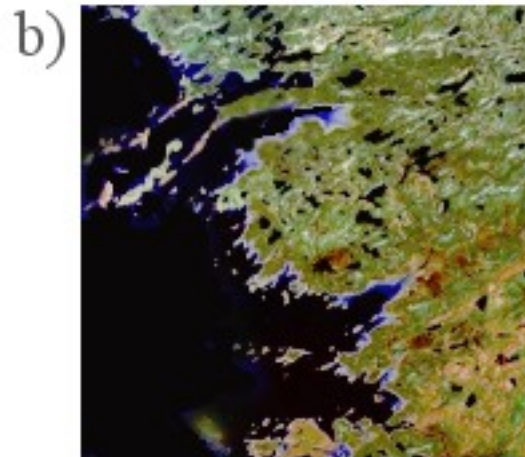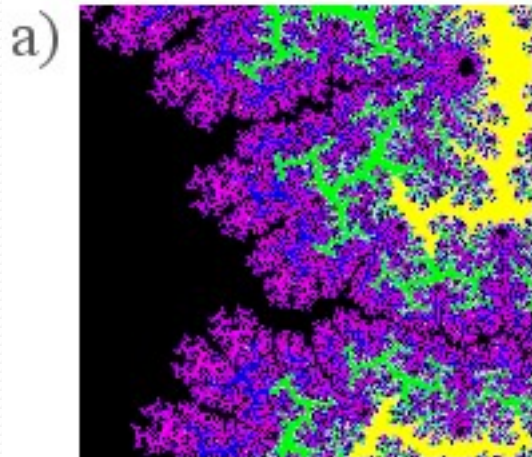
The recursive web

slimfigures.co.uk

Linked Lists are Self-Similar

- a linked list is:
  - null
  - a node whose `next` field references a list

- **recursive data structure**: a data structure partially composed of smaller or simpler instances of the same data structure

ALOEACEAE
**ALOE
POLYPHYLLA
SPIRAL ALOE**
S. AFRICA

a) Part of the Mandelbrot set.

b) Part of the North American coastline near Hudson Bay.

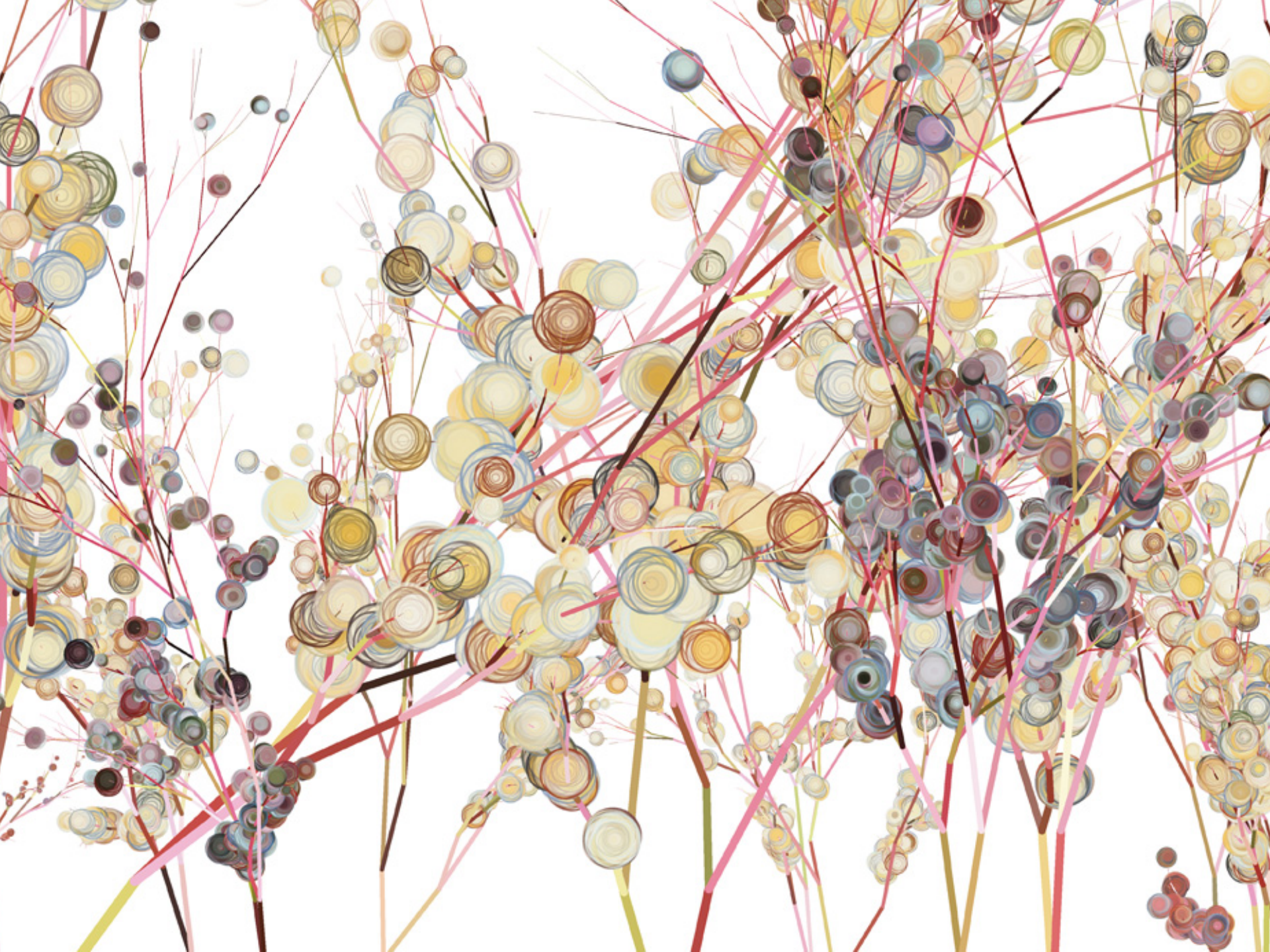# Recursion

- **recursion**: The definition of an operation in terms of itself.
  - Solving a problem using recursion depends on solving smaller occurrences of the same problem.

- **recursive programming**: Writing methods that call themselves to solve problems recursively.

  - An equally powerful substitute for *iteration* (loops)
  - Particularly well-suited to solving certain types of problems

Why learn recursion?

- "Cultural experience" – think differently about problems

- Solves some problems more naturally than iteration

- Leads to elegant, simplistic, short code (when used well)

- Many programming languages ("functional" languages such as Scheme, ML, and Haskell) use recursion exclusively (no loops)

- A key component of many of our assignments in CSE 143

THE
BLACK SWAN

The Impact of the
HIGHLY IMPROBABLE

Nassim Nicholas Taleb

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GÖDEL, ESCHER, BACH:
an Eternal Golden Braid

DOUGLAS R. HOFSTADTER

A metaphorical fugue on minds and machines in the spirit of Lewis Carroll
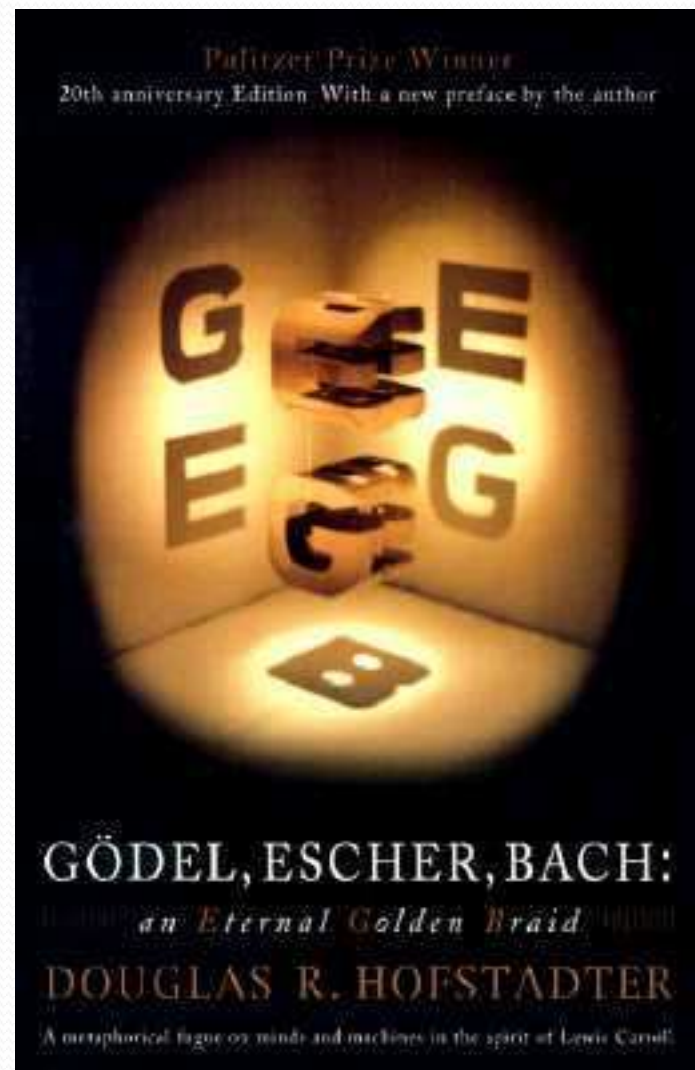
Exercise

- (To a student in the front row)
  How many students total are directly behind you in your
  "column" of the classroom?

  - You have poor vision, so you can
    see only the people right next to you.
    So you can't just look back and count.

  - But you are allowed to ask
    questions of the person next to you.

  - How can we solve this problem?
    (*recursively*)

How many people are in this column?
... Uh, how do I figure that out again?
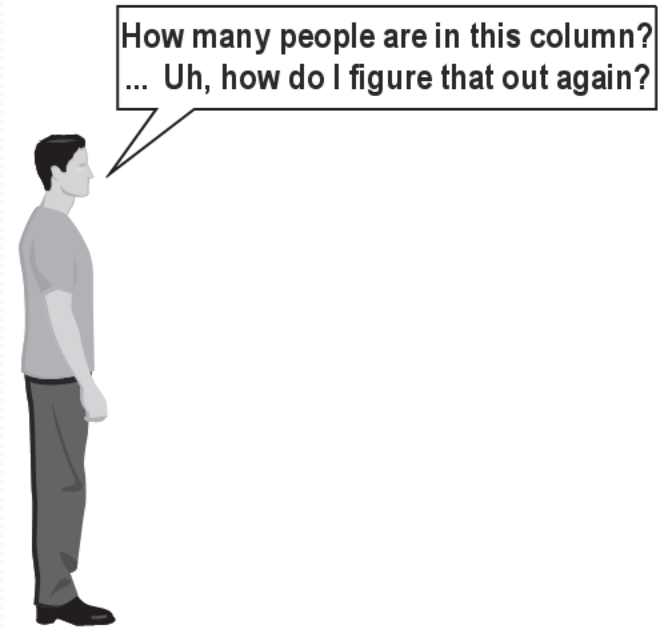
The idea

- Recursion is all about breaking a big problem into smaller occurrences of that same problem.

  - Each person can solve a small part of the problem.
    - What is a small version of the problem that would be easy to answer?
    - What information from a neighbor might help me?
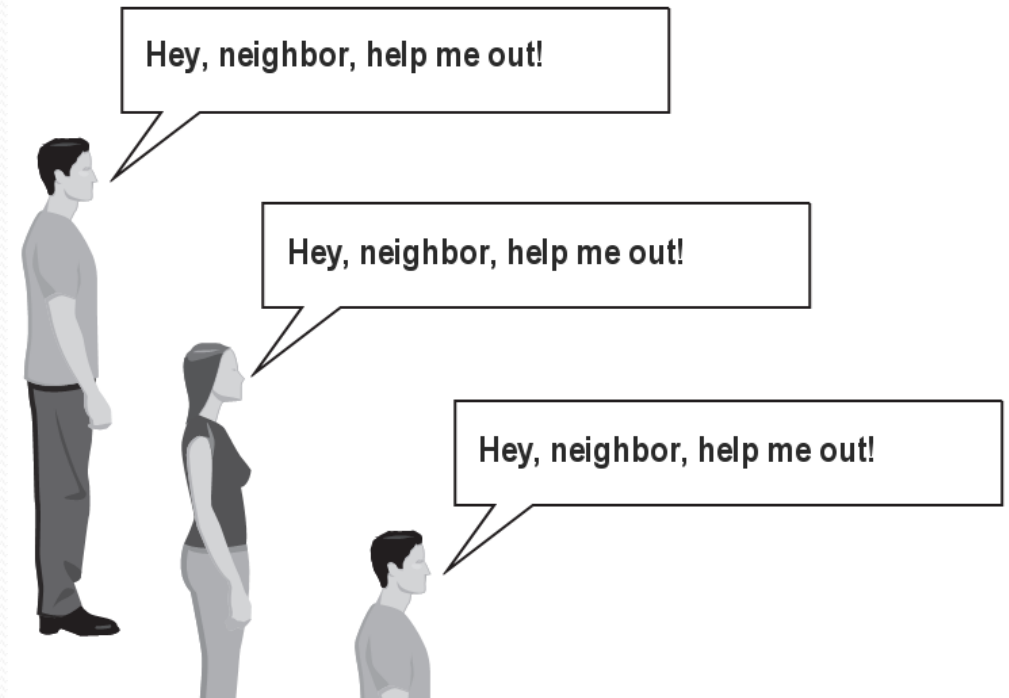
Recursive algorithm

- Number of people behind me:
  - If there is someone behind me,
    ask him/her how many people are behind him/her.
    - When they respond with a value **N**, then I will answer **N + 1**.

  - If there is nobody behind me, I will answer **0**.

3. How many people are behind me?

2. How many people are behind me?

1. How many people are behind me?
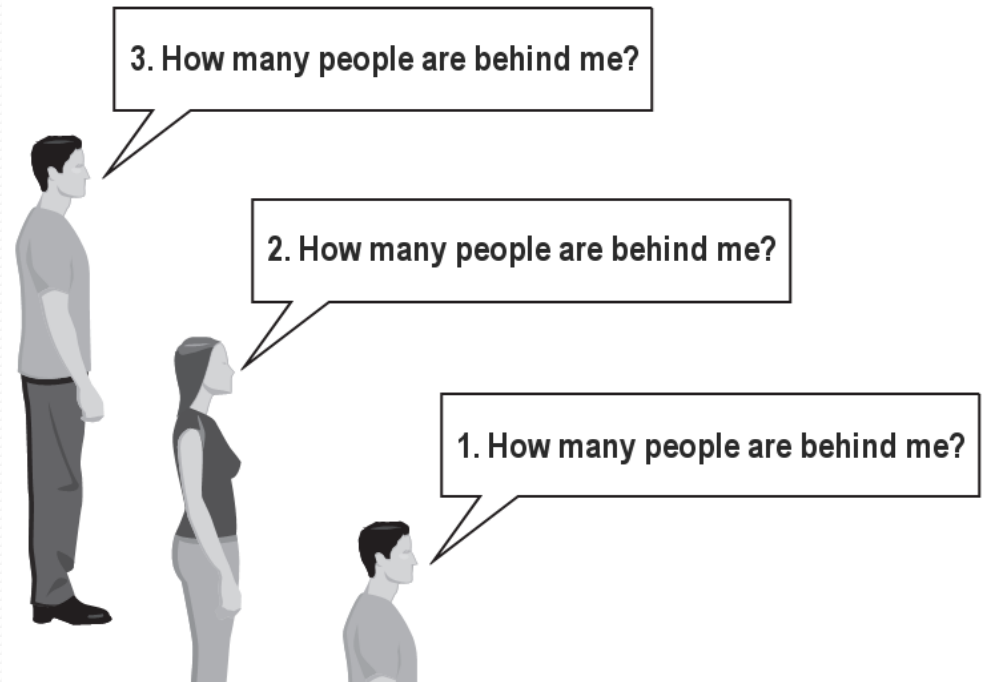
Recursion and cases

- Every recursive algorithm involves at least 2 cases:

  - **base case**: A simple occurrence that can be answered directly.

  - **recursive case**: A more complex occurrence of the problem that cannot be directly answered, but can instead be described in terms of smaller occurrences of the same problem.

  - Some recursive algorithms have more than one base or recursive case, but all have at least one of each.

  - A crucial part of recursive programming is identifying these cases.

Getting down stairs

- Need to know two things:
  - Getting down one stair
  - Recognizing the bottom

- Most code will look like:

```
if (simplest case) {
    compute and return solution
} else {
    divide into similar subproblem(s)
    solve each subproblem recursively
    assemble the overall solution
}
```

Another recursive task

- How can we remove exactly half of the M&M's in a large bowl, without dumping them all out or being able to count them?

  - What if multiple people help out with solving the problem? Can each person do a small part of the work?

  - What is a number of M&M's that it is easy to double, even if you can't count?

    - (What is a "base case"?)

Recursion in Java

- Consider the following method to print a line of * characters:

```java
// Prints a line containing the given number of stars.
// Precondition: n >= 0
public static void printStars(int n) {
    for (int i = 0; i < n; i++) {
        System.out.print("*");
    }
    System.out.println();   // end the line of output
}
```

- Write a recursive version of this method (that calls itself).
  - Solve the problem without using any loops.
  - Hint: Your solution should print just one star at a time.

A basic case

- What are the cases to consider?
  - What is a very easy number of stars to print without a loop?

```java
public static void printStars(int n) {
    if (n == 1) {
        // base case; just print one star
        System.out.println("*");
    } else {
        ...
    }
}
```

Handling more cases

- Handling additional cases, with no loops (in a bad way):

```java
public static void printStars(int n) {
    if (n == 1) {
        // base case; just print one star
        System.out.println("*");
    } else if (n == 2) {
        System.out.print("*");
        System.out.println("*");
    } else if (n == 3) {
        System.out.print("*");
        System.out.print("*");
        System.out.println("*");
    } else if (n == 4) {
        System.out.print("*");
        System.out.print("*");
        System.out.print("*");
        System.out.println("*");
    } else ...
}
```

Handling more cases 2

- Taking advantage of the repeated pattern (somewhat better):

```
public static void printStars(int n) {
    if (n == 1) {
        // base case; just print one star
        System.out.println("*");
    } else if (n == 2) {
        System.out.print("*");
        printStars(1);     // prints "*"
    } else if (n == 3) {
        System.out.print("*");
        printStars(2);     // prints "**"
    } else if (n == 4) {
        System.out.print("*");
        printStars(3);     // prints "***"
    } else ...
}
```

Using recursion properly

- Condensing the recursive cases into a single case:

```java
public static void printStars(int n) {
    if (n == 1) {
        // base case; just print one star
        System.out.println("*");
    } else {
        // recursive case; print one more star
        System.out.print("*");
        printStars(n - 1);
    }
}
```

"Recursion Zen"

- The real, even simpler, base case is an `n` of 0, not 1:

```java
public static void printStars(int n) {
    if (n == 0) {
        // base case; just end the line of output
        System.out.println();
    } else {
        // recursive case; print one more star
        System.out.print("*");
        printStars(n - 1);
    }
}
```

- **Recursion Zen**: The art of properly identifying the best set of cases for a recursive algorithm and expressing them elegantly.

  (A CSE 143 informal term)

Recursive tracing

- Consider the following recursive method:

```
public static int mystery(int n) {
    if (n < 10) {
        return n;
    } else {
        int a = n / 10;
        int b = n % 10;
        return mystery(a + b);
    }
}
```

- What is the result of the following call?

```
mystery(648)
```

A recursive trace

```
mystery(648):
    ▪ int a = 648 / 10;        // 64
    ▪ int b = 648 % 10;        //  8
    ▪ return mystery(a + b);   // mystery(72)

    mystery(72):
    ▪ int a = 72 / 10;         // 7
    ▪ int b = 72 % 10;         // 2
    ▪ return mystery(a + b);   // mystery(9)

        mystery(9):
        ▪ return 9;
```

Recursive tracing 2

- Consider the following recursive method:

```
public static int mystery(int n) {
    if (n < 10) {
        return (10 * n) + n;
    } else {
        int a = mystery(n / 10);
        int b = mystery(n % 10);
        return (100 * a) + b;
    }
}
```

- What is the result of the following call?

```
mystery(348)
```

A recursive trace 2

```
mystery(348)
    int a = mystery(34);
        int a = mystery(3);
            return (10 * 3) + 3;    // 33
        int b = mystery(4);
            return (10 * 4) + 4;    // 44
        return (100 * 33) + 44;     // 3344

    int b = mystery(8);
    return (10 * 8) + 8;            // 88

    return (100 * 3344) + 88;    // 334488
```

- What is this method really doing?

Exercise

- Write a recursive method `reverseLines` that accepts a file `Scanner` and prints the lines of the file in reverse order.

  - Example input file:

    ```
    I have eaten
    the plums
    that were in
    the icebox
    ```

    Expected console output:

    ```
    the icebox
    that were in
    the plums
    I have eaten
    ```

  - What are the cases to consider?
    - How can we solve a small part of the problem at a time?
    - What is a file that is very easy to reverse?

Reversal pseudocode

- Reversing the lines of a file:
  - Read a line L from the file.
  - Print the rest of the lines in reverse order.
  - Print the line L.

- If only we had a way to reverse the rest of the lines of the file....

Reversal solution

```java
public static void reverseLines(Scanner input) {
    if (input.hasNextLine()) {
        // recursive case
        String line = input.nextLine();
        reverseLines(input);
        System.out.println(line);
    }
}
```

- Where is the base case?

Tracing our algorithm

- **call stack**: The method invocations currently running

```
reverseLines(new Scanner("poem.txt"));
```

```
public static void reverseLines(Scanner input) {
    if (input.hasNextLine()) {
        String line = input.nextLine();  // "I have eaten"
public static void reverseLines(Scanner input) {
    if (input.hasNextLine()) {
        String line = input.nextLine();  // "the plums"
public static void reverseLines(Scanner input) {
    if (input.hasNextLine()) {
        String line = input.nextLine();  // "that were in"
public static void reverseLines(Scanner input) {
    if (input.hasNextLine()) {
        String line = input.nextLine();  // "the icebox"
public static void reverseLines(Scanner input) {
    if (input.hasNextLine()) {    // false
        ...
    }
}
```

```
I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox
```

```
the icebox
that were in
the plums
I have eaten
```