CSE 341: Programming Languages

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Lecture 12— Modules; Abstract Types
Modules

Large programs benefit from more structure than a list of bindings.
Breaking into parts allows separate reasoning:

• Application-level: in terms of module (in ML, structure) invariants
• Type-checking level: in terms of module types
• Implementation level: in terms of module code-generation

By providing a restricted interface (in ML, a signature), there are more equivalent implementations in terms of the interface.

Key restrictions:

• Make bindings inaccessible
• Make types abstract (know type exists, but not its definition)

SML has a much fancier module system, but we’ll stick with the basics.
Abstract types are a “top-5” feature of modern languages.
Structure basics

Syntax: `structure Name = struct bindings end`

If `x` is a variable, exception, type, constructor, etc. defined in `Name`, the rest of the program refers to it via `Name.x`

(You can also do `open Name`, which is often bad style, but convenient when testing.)

So far, this is just `namespace management`, which is important for large programs, but not very interesting.
Signature basics

(For those interested in learning more, we’re doing only *opaque signatures* on structure definitions.)

A signature signature BLAH = sig ... end is like a type for a structure.

- Describes what types a structure provides.
- Describes what values a structure provides (and their types).

Writing structure Name :> BLAH = struct bindings end:

- Ensures Name is a legal implementation of BLAH.
- Ensures code outside of Name assumes nothing more than what BLAH provides.

Hence signatures are what really enable separate reasoning.
Signature matching

Is Name a legal implementation of BLAH.

- Clearly it must define everything in BLAH.
- It can define more (unavailable outside of Name).
- BLAH can restrict the type of polymorphic functions.
- BLAH can make types abstract.

In particular, making a datatype abstract hides the constructors, so clients have no (direct) way to create or access-parts-of values of the type.

That’s often a good thing.
Remember

A signature that “hides more” makes it easier to:

- Replace the structure implementation without breaking clients.
- Reason about how clients use the structure.

Note: The real “content” of this lecture is in the extended example.